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Honoré Gabriel de Riqueti,
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MIRABEAU

THE DEMI-GOD

BEING THE TRUE AND ROMANTIC STORY
OF HIS LIFE AND ADVENTURES

BY

W. R. H. TROWBRIDGE

AUTHOR OF "COURT BEAUTIES OF OLD WHITEHALL"
"A GIRL OF THE MULTITUDE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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DEDICATORY LETTER

DEAR MADAME VAN DE VELDE,—

In asking you to accept the dedication of this book, whose progress you have watched with so much interest, there are two matters in connection with it on which, I think, some explanation is due to others.

First, as regards the portrait I have attempted to paint of Mirabeau:

There are few historical characters of whom so much is known as Mirabeau, none whom it is so impossible to describe accurately or to consider dispassionately. Even his most "scientific" biographer has been unable to conceal a prejudice that closely resembles personal spite. In Loménie's book Mirabeau is a monster, his father, the implacable and selfish Marquis, is described as a paragon of virtue, while something very much like a nimbus decorates the head of the odious Madame de Pailly. Yet Loménie's book is a standard authority, at least as far as the careful and orderly arrangement of the minutest details of his subject is concerned. It is in the interpretation that he has put upon these details that this "scientific" biographer has failed. For the fact is Mirabeau was an exaggeration, and in writing of him one unconsciously falls into an exaggeration of panegyric or invective. There seems to be no middle course between loving and hating him. I frankly admit that I have preferred to see in him only his nobler and what I believe to be his fundamental qualities, and it has been my object to convey my sympathetic impression that he sinned far less than he was sinned against. There are many, no doubt, who will hold the opposite opinion with equal persistency, and perhaps with an equal lack

of sobriety. But if I have erred, I have erred with Lamartine and Michelet, Sainte-Beuve and Carlyle. My chief regret is that I have not paid tribute enough to my hero. I have felt too intensely the indescribable charm of his vivid personality to be able to convey it to others.

Secondly, as regards the frame of this portrait:

I should like to have written a biography of Mirabeau, to have dug out of the eight volumes of Lucas de Montigny the one that Carlyle said they contained. But the more I meditated on the subject, the more the "novel" in his extraordinary career appealed to my instinct as a novelist. The amount of information, however, with which in my research I was overwhelmed speedily disabused me of any such idea, or my novel must have rivalled Montigny's biography in bulk.

In the end, unwilling to abandon my desire to write a book on Mirabeau, I decided to adopt the present makeshift, in which the true and romantic story of his life practically tells itself, so to speak.

To avoid any charge of striving after the *éclat* of historical research, I have refrained from adding the notes with which it is so easy to adorn a work of this kind. But to satisfy the curiosity of those who may be inclined to question the accuracy of details that seem doubtful, I have appended a bibliography of the works from which I have drawn my materials. In this connection I would state in defence of the dialogue that it is seldom imaginary; when not the words actually uttered by the speakers as historically recorded, it has been composed from their correspondence. For example, in Chapter I., Part I., pages 22 to 35, the dialogue has been taken almost verbatim from the letters of the Marquis de Mirabeau.

Believe me, dear Madame Van de Velde,

Yours faithfully,

W. R. H. TROWBRIDGE.

LONDON,
October, 1907.

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MIRABEAU THE DEMIGOD

PROLOGUE

ABOUT seventy miles south of Paris in the Loiret, one of the three departments into which the old province of Orléanais is now divided, there is an insignificant village that goes by the rather grand name of Le Bignon-Mirabeau. In 1749, when Gabriel Honoré de Riqueti was born here, this village, as insignificant then as it is now, was known merely as Bignon. The slight alteration in the name is a very fair index of the extent of the changes that have occurred in an interval of some one hundred and fifty odd years. Time apparently has fallen asleep at Bignon, and if awakened would be far less surprised than Rip van Winkle at what he saw. 'Tis true the inhabitants dress in a fashion somewhat different from that which was in vogue when Comte Gabriel was a boy, and the great folk at the old *château* where he was born are no longer the Mirabeaus. But if it were possible for Madame la Marquise to look out of the windows of that house in which she passed so many unhappy years, her eyes would behold the same shady gardens and stone terraces as were in existence when she first came to Bignon. Or if M. le Marquis the Friend of Men—saving always his own family—could saunter down the dusty white road into one of the green meadows gilded by the sun where the people are at play, perhaps he could hardly tell the

difference between a *fête champêtre* of to-day and the "*festivités villageoises*" of which he was the benevolent patron in his own day.

Bignon or Le Bignon-Mirabeau, it is all the same. It was asleep when the Giant was born at the *château*, it slept till he woke it for a moment with his Melibœan voice in the Revolution, and it has slept ever since, as deep a sleep as that of the Seven Sleepers combined. Nothing has been able to wake it—not the noisy tumult of the nineteenth century, nor the bluster of the Socialistic ideal, nor even the presidential decree baptizing it afresh with the magical name of Mirabeau.

"V'là," cried a barefoot *gamin*, looking up from his play in the dusty road as I passed. "V'là, l'ancienne gloire de France!" And he pointed to the *château* in which Mirabeau the Great was born.

"And here where you are sitting, m'sieur," said my hostess of the Ecu d'Or, "sat Madame la Comtesse de Martel, *née* Mirabeau, when she visited Bignon the year the statue of her great-great-uncle was erected at Montargis, which ought by rights to have been ours. You have heard of her, of course? It is she who has written those clever books under the name of Gyp. Ah, how she praised my *sauce Rémoulade!*"

"I suppose you are all proud of the name of Mirabeau hereabouts," I said.

"I am," she replied, "for his blood flows in my veins. My great-grandmother's mother was his daughter."

She uttered the words as naturally as if she were stating a self-evident fact. It was quite free from any vaunting or flourish, the *panache*, so to speak, that one might have expected to follow such a statement. I looked at her with surprise mingled with admiration. It seemed to me that I had not noticed her before. She was apparently about thirty-five, a healthy, handsome, matronly specimen of the best class of French peasant, refined by intelligence and very possibly education. Her

eyes were magnificent. They reminded me of what I had read of George Sand's.

She noticed my surprise and added :

"M'sieur doubts me ?"

Had the perfect self-confidence of her manner failed to carry conviction, the sudden recollection of Mirabeau's notorious incontinence would have given a peculiar weight to her words.

"I came to Bignon," I said, "out of a curiosity to see your famous ancestor's birthplace, but I did not expect to find such an interesting link with the past. Can you tell me anything about him ? I am preparing the material for a book on him."

Her manner changed suddenly ; it was evident that I had touched the one vulnerable spot of her peasant-like imperturbability.

"So, m'sieur is writing a book on Mirabeau," she exclaimed with emotion ; "then you are visiting the places in France associated with his life ? I can show you some souvenirs of him that you will not find elsewhere. They have been in my family since the Revolution."

She went hastily to an *escritoire* and took out of one of the drawers a small portfolio.

"The Musée Carnavalet at Paris would give me almost any price I might ask for these relics," she said proudly enough now, "but they are sacred. I would not part from them." And she spread the contents on a table before my bewildered and astonished eyes. They gave eloquent proof of the woman's Mirabeau-mania.

"Here," she said, passing me one after the other of her treasures, "is a photograph of Madame la Comtesse de Martel, *née* Mirabeau. See, it is signed 'Gyp.' This is a Montargis journal giving an account of the *fêtes* when the statue of Mirabeau was unveiled. I was treated with great honour that day, m'sieur."

There fell from the folds of the paper a little cotton

tricolor flag with a portrait of Mirabeau printed in the middle.

And then I was shown some old and very rare engravings on wood: Mirabeau in the Convention; Mirabeau at the Jacobins; Mirabeau pleading before the Parlement at Aix; Mirabeau bending over the hand of Marie Antoinette in the garden of St. Cloud, with a scroll coming from his mouth on which were the words of his famous boast: "Madame, the monarchy is saved!" Underneath this picture was another of the Queen at the guillotine and Mirabeau in hell. With these odd relics were mingled a strange collection of very modern picture post-cards from places closely associated with the hero, such as the Château d'If, the Château de Vincennes, the Château de Mirabeau, and views of Joux, Pontarlier, the Isle of Rhé, Saintes, Grasse, and even Corsica.

"And this," she said with indescribable pride, "is a sketch my son has made. He is an artist in Paris."

It was a clever study for a romantic canvas on which the son was at work: Mirabeau and Sophie de Monnier in their attic in Holland at the moment of their arrest.

"You are a Mirabeau worshipper, madame," I said softly, touched by her enthusiasm.

"Yes," she replied, with a sigh. "The thought of Mirabeau is the motive of my life. They think me a little mad in Bignon; perhaps I am. I dream all day of the past; there is nothing else to do."

The woman was a character, a *trouvaille* to one writing a book on Mirabeau. Mad or not, she could, perhaps, give me ideas, information, that I might not find elsewhere. And she was willing, eager to talk. I was *simpatica*, as the Italians say.

Strangely, she had read but very few of the many books that have been written on her hero and ancestor. Those she had read, however, were the chief authorities

—Lucas de Montigny and Loménie. She was, too, capable of expressing a competent opinion of their respective merits. The eight chaotic volumes of the former she compared to a quarry out of which the latter had hewn the granite for his monumental group of Mirabeau and his father. Carlyle's fascinating essay she had never so much as heard of.

"Of course, m'sieur," she said, when we spoke of the singular character of Mirabeau's father, "you must not forget to tell about their ancestors. I think that is the only way that the people who will read your book will be able to understand and sympathise with M. le Marquis and the great man from whom I have the satisfaction of being descended. They were from the very first an exceptional race, the Riquetis. Ah, if I could write, how I would describe them! France never produced a family like them. They all possessed the same proud, wild, original spirit from first to last. It was hereditary in them, like an instinct. Any one of them might have been Mirabeau, and he might have been any one of them. They were true sons of the whirlwind. They were born in a tempest and they perished in the Revolution."

"According to one writer, a compatriot of mine," I observed, "they were like bulls in a crockery shop."

"They were Ghibellines in Florence," she went on in a rapt manner, without heeding my flippant interruption, "when the Guelphs drove them out and they came to France. That was a long, long time ago, m'sieur, in 1267. You see, I know the date when the Riquetis became French. There are not many families in France that can boast such a pedigree!"

"It has been said, madame," I remarked, "as doubtless you have read, that when they first came to France from Italy they were not really of noble birth, as they claimed. They were merchants at Marseilles before they were lords of Mirabeau."

"No, m'sieur," she replied with conviction, "they were

of noble birth when they came to France. Azzo Riqueti immediately after his arrival married Sybilla of Foss, so famed by the troubadours. A great heiress like her would not have married beneath her. The times were proud, m'sieur."

"But at any rate they were traders for a long time in Marseilles," I protested; "not that I think that was anything against them. The foundation of their fortune was made in the coral trade."

"It was the custom of the time," she said, still unshaken. "Most of the great Italian nobles in the great republican cities were merchants. The Medicis were bankers at Florence. The Riquetis were merchant-princes at Marseilles. It was not long before a Riqueti became First Consul there. Four times they held the office, and each time had the honour of opening the gates of the city to a King of France. When Louis XIV. abolished the office he created Honoré de Riqueti, who was the last to hold it, Marquis de Mirabeau."

I abandoned my guns. In the face of her firm conviction that no *bourgeois* taint had ever sullied the blood of the Mirabeaus, it would have been waste of breath to have replied that trade always assumes the name of commerce in maritime cities naturally inclined towards republicanism.

"Besides, m'sieur," she continued, "none but a noble could be First Consul in Marseilles. When the Bishop of Digne taunted Jean de Riqueti with being a trader of Marseilles, he retorted, 'I am a trader in police as you are a trader in holy water!'"

"Answered in the true Mirabeau spirit," I laughed.

"Ah, they were a hot, haughty, dauntless race, m'sieur," she mused. "Nothing was ever impossible to them. One chained two mountains together at Moustier, in Provence, in fulfilment of a vow he made at sea. They were great fighters, too, but I never heard of one without chivalry. They were always on the side of the weak and

oppressed; independence and love of it were bred in their bones. In the old fierce days there was never a quarrel in Provence that there was not a Riqueti in it."

"There is an anecdote told of the wife of one of them in this respect," I said, "that I always remember. It is very characteristic of the Mirabeau spirit."

"Which is that, m'sieur?" she asked eagerly. "They had a habit of marrying women as haughty and independent as themselves."

"It is a story about the one who was wont to carry a pistol in her girdle. Going to Mass one day she met a certain lady rudely trying to enter the church ahead of her, whereupon Madame de Mirabeau, who was very jealous of her right of precedence, gave her a box on the ear, saying, 'Here, as in the army, the baggage goes last!'"

"Apropos of her pistol, m'sieur," laughed my hostess, "I can tell you an anecdote still more characteristic both of her and the family. A certain braggart, the Chevalier de Griasque, once insulted her. Instantly she drew her pistol and levelled it at his head, saying, 'Scoundrel, I would blow out your insolent brains, but I have children who will avenge me in a more honourable manner.' She had five sons; one, not yet seventeen, a Knight of Malta, as soon as he heard of the insult to his mother, came to Marseilles and challenged Griasque. 'I am going to bleed a chicken,' said Griasque to his friends. They fought in the garden, and the 'chicken,' having locked the doors, threw the keys over the wall and killed his man! This same Riqueti on his return to Malta had a quarrel with the general of the galleys, the nephew of the Grand Master, and struck him. It was a most serious matter, and having no stomach for the punishment he knew he would receive for his insubordination, he jumped overboard and swam to a ship, which, luckily for him, was at that moment setting sail. Ah, m'sieur, the Riquetis were

always as independent and daring as they were hot-headed and haughty. You have heard of Col d'Argent, M. le Marquis's father?"

"Yes," I said, "he was the man Vendôme used to call his 'right arm,' and who was all but killed of twenty-seven wounds in one hour at the battle of Cassano."

"He was just such another," she laughed, flattered by my knowledge of the exploits of the kindred of whom she was so proud; "a haughty, independent, original character. He was not even afraid of Louis XIV. The Mirabeaus were never afraid of kings. After that battle of Cassano—'the day on which I was killed,' he used to call it, for he had to wear a silver stock to keep up his head ever after, whence his nickname Col d'Argent—Vendôme presented him to the King, who complimented him on his bravery, which had not been, and never was, rewarded.

"'Yes, sire,' he replied fearlessly, 'and if I had left my fighting and come to court and bribed some prostitute, I might have had my promotion and fewer wounds to-day!'

"Louis XIV. was too ashamed or too proud, perhaps, to be angry, and Vendôme said to Col d'Argent afterwards, 'I ought to have known you; henceforward I shall always present you to the enemy and never to the King.'

"He was always doing things like that, in the original, fearless Riqueti way, flinging unjust tax-gatherers into the Durance at Mirabeau, half killing cheating custom-house officers at Marseilles, punishing refractory priests, discharging tyrannous stewards, and helping the peasants on his estates. A very honourable, clean-minded man.

"'I would rather strangle my children than place them in the *mousquetaires*,' he said.

"He had served in that regiment himself, and knew the bad effect the gay, licentious life in it had upon young men."

"He had a bit of romance in him too," I observed,

remembering what an excessive part affairs of the heart had played in Mirabeau's famous grandsire's life.

"Yes," she said, "he married a Mademoiselle de Castellane without a *dot*, a thing that in the eighteenth century only a Mirabeau could have done, and that very few Frenchmen would do even to-day. He met her when he was taking the waters at Digne, where he had gone to recover from his wounds. He was thirty-nine at the time, and she was but a slip of a girl. They fell madly in love with one another, and he, fearing that her parents would never consent to her marrying him, seeing how mutilated he was, begged her to elope with him. But she was as sensible and shrewd then as she proved to be all her life, and persuaded him to ask for her hand in the usual way. When they were married, in spite of the discrepancy in their years and his scars and silver stock, it was said there was not a handsomer couple in Provence. Ah, m'sieur, the Riquetis were as headstrong in their love-affairs as they were in everything else they did. You remember Louis Alexandre, M. le Marquis's youngest brother? What a chip of the old stock he was! He was only twenty-one, a mere strip of a lieutenant, handsome and impulsive and penniless, when he met Mademoiselle Navarre, the actress, in Paris. She was very beautiful, and had been the mistress of a score of men, including old Marmontel and the Maréchal de Saxe, when she met Louis Alexandre and fell head over ears in love with him. And do you think he wanted her as a mistress? Not he. If he couldn't have her as his wife he wouldn't have her at all, so what did they do but run off to Holland to marry; then, as it wasn't safe to come back to France, where M. le Marquis, who was as proud as Lucifer, would have got a *lettre de cachet* and locked up both of them, he carried her off to Germany and took service in the army under the Margrave of Baireuth. But, poor souls, their happiness didn't last long, and she died out there of consumption. M'sieur,

when you tell in your book about Mirabeau and Sophie, remember Louis Alexandre and Mademoiselle Navarre. Mirabeau could not help loving in the romantic, mad way he did. It was in his blood. He inherited the love-instinct along with all his other qualities."

And in this fashion the good woman chattered away on the strange family with whom she was so remotely and significantly connected until it was time for me to return to Montargis.

"Don't forget, m'sieur," she said when I left her, "to put the old Riquetis into your book. It will help people to understand Mirabeau."

She followed me into the dusty road, and stood there in the twilight of the summer day till I was out of sight, her strong face illumined by her brilliant, emotional eyes —a tall, robust Gâtinaise, mysterious and brooding, like the sybilline mothers of the Revolution.

"I hope you will call on my son when you go to Paris, m'sieur," were her last words. "He is putting that into his painting of Mirabeau and Sophie which you should put into your book—enthusiasm."

And during the greater part of the night in my room at Montargis, where they have the statue of Mirabeau which ought to have been Bignon's, I thought of the passionate old Riquetis and their last and supreme re-incarnation, who wore a Nessus-shirt like Hercules, and had all France for his funeral pyre!

PART I

THE BOY

CHAPTER I

A QUESTION OF ECONOMY

THE *salon* of the Comtesse de Rochefort had never presented a more brilliant appearance. It seemed as if all Paris was crowded into the apartments which she occupied in the Luxembourg, and everything that tact and wit, art and intelligence could devise was being displayed in the hope of making political economy attractive to society.

It was not an easy subject to popularise, as the Comtesse had been trying to do for some time past, for political economy as it was understood by those who professed it had a serious purpose, and Parisian society had no purpose whatever—unless it was to shout "*Après nous le délugé!*" with Louis the Well-beloved. To most of the Comtesse's guests it was much more amusing to go to Madame du Deffand's for scandal and epigrams or to Madame Geoffrin's for intrigue and paradoxes than to come to the Luxembourg to listen to Economists croaking of ruin and regeneration. But just then the Comtesse de Rochefort happened to be the fashion, in spite of the jealousy of her rivals, who declared that at her *soirées* one could not distinguish her Economists for the crush. This gibe, however, was not happy, for it proved the popularity of the Comtesse, if not of the sect she championed.

Indeed, that little group who called the Marquis de Mirabeau "Master," and strove to avert the Revolution

which they were the first to foresee forty years before the fall of the Bastille, could hardly have found a more influential patroness. A Brancas by birth, her rank was illustrious rather than noble—a subtle difference only to be appreciated, perhaps, by an aristocrat of *la vieille cour.* There were no two opinions as to her beauty, for Nattier painted her, and as those who are familiar with his portraits are aware, he only painted women of an exquisitely refined type; while in an age when manners were considered an art, which has since been lost, the Comtesse de Rochefort's had the irresistible grace of sincerity. Her friends were friends for life. Therefore, when with birth, beauty, and charm she possessed tact and wit, it goes without saying that the people who thronged her *salon* and gave it its extremely brilliant appearance were likely to be the most distinguished in France.

"My dear Montagu," said a handsome Englishman in the prime of life, addressing a young compatriot at his side, "as a foreigner of rank and fashion there is no *salon* in Paris where you could make your *début* more fittingly than here. To enter French society *viâ* Madame de Rochefort's *salon* is to be *rangé* at once, while as a mere traveller in search of the sights of the capital you are in the enviable position of beholding some of the most famous without the least fatigue. In all Paris there are no more interesting public monuments than those you will find here to-night." And as his alert, inquisitive eyes glanced round the room they continually exchanged smiling greetings with the many familiar faces they encountered in the brilliant assembly.

"You seem to know everybody, Mr. Walpole," said the young Englishman. "Who is that man covered with orders who is talking to Madame de Rochefort?"

"That is by no means the least important person here," remarked Walpole in his bright, racy way. "The Duc de Nivernais is the head of the house of Mancini-

Mazarin, a diplomatist, statesman, poet, musician, and Academician. He is also known in Parisian society as the lover of the fascinating Comtesse. The *liaison*, however," he added, dropping his voice, "is platonic, *bien entendu*, which partially explains the perfect equanimity with which the Duchesse de Nivernais regards it. In fact, Madame du Deffand assures me it is quite a 'decent arrangement.' I should like you to meet him, Montagu. I consider him one of the most accomplished noblemen in France."

"What a beautiful woman!" exclaimed Montagu, whose attention was suddenly diverted from the Duc de Nivernais.

"Where?" said Walpole. "There are so many beautiful women here."

"There, all in black. She looks as if she had stepped out of a canvas by Nattier."

"Oh, you mean the *chatte noire*. They call her that because she always dresses in black, I suppose because she knows it suits her. Yes, she is very beautiful."

"What is her name?" asked Montagu.

"Madame de Pailly," said Walpole, smiling cynically.

"Why do you smile, Mr. Walpole?" asked the other. "Is she not—not *decent*, as you say they term it here?"

But Horace Walpole, without heeding this question, suddenly plucked Montagu by the arm, and attracting his attention to a couple who were conversing animatedly a few feet off, whispered in his ear:

"Do you see the two immediately in front of us? They are the Marquise de Mirepoix and the Maréchal de Richelieu. I must ask Madame du Deffand how they have happened to make up their quarrel, for I always understood they were bitter enemies. He killed her first husband, the Prince de Lixin, in a duel."

"What," said Montagu, "is that the famous Maréchal de Richelieu, the man they call the Alcibiades of France, and who has had so many extraordinary love-affairs?"

"He was a great dandy in his day," mused Walpole, "though you would scarcely think it now, to look at him. It was he who in the Regency set the fashion of the powdered peruke which we are still wearing."

Young Montagu's interest in Madame de Pailly was, however, much greater than that he took in the Maréchal, and, as his gaze returned to her, he said:

"But tell me about the *chatte noire*, Mr. Walpole. Why did you smile when you mentioned her?"

"Madame de Pailly, my dear Montagu," replied Walpole with ironical gaiety, "is the bright, particular star of this *salon* and one of Madame de Rochefort's great friends. Between us, I cannot understand what such a woman as the Comtesse sees in her. One never meets her anywhere else than here. The Nivernais, for instance, have never asked her to St. Maur."

"Why, what has she done? You interest me, Mr. Walpole. I think her quite the best-looking woman here."

"So does the Marquis de Mirabeau. It is said that she is his mistress."

"What, of the Friend of Men?" asked Montagu with great surprise. "I should have imagined that such a man led the most regular life."

"So he does, and perhaps the 'arrangement,' as Madame du Deffand says, is after all quite as decent as that between the Comtesse and Nivernais. But one never can tell, and it is an open secret that the Marquise de Mirabeau hates her. She is what we should term in England an adventuress. La belle Bernoise calls herself Swiss and a Protestant, but as she has lived the greater part of her life in France she is as French and as Catholic, or I should say as much of a freethinker, as the rest of the people here. She is married to a fellow-countryman about fifty years her senior, who till recently held a commission in the French army, when he retired on a pension and returned to his

native country. As M. de Pailly was willing to admit that a life of seclusion in Switzerland could have no charms for his young, brilliant, and ambitious wife, he considerately agreed, after the happy custom of this country, to an amicable separation. Either through her husband's influence or her own arts she has managed to procure from the King a suite of apartments in the Luxembourg, where, being a near neighbour to the Comtesse de Rochefort, she has quickly made that lady's acquaintance, won her friendship, and under her social ægis is endeavouring to conquer a position in society. There, Montagu, that is all I know of the beauty. But excuse me for a moment, I must speak to Madame du Deffand."

And Horace Walpole sauntered off airily and joined the court round the blind marquise, who was uttering the wisdom of the world with her customary malice and wit while she stroked a little dog in her lap.

As the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* with his mistress—as the world, no doubt in error, as it so often is, persisted in considering this singular old woman, whose spell over the cynical, brilliant Englishman its ridicule had been unable to snap—seemed slight, Walpole after a few minutes at her side whispered a word in her ear, kissed her still beautiful hand, patted Tonton on the head, and rejoined Montagu, with whom, arm in arm, he proceeded to make the tour of the rooms.

The company was, perhaps, too numerous for the attention of everybody to be concentrated at the same time on any one of the intellectual stars present, as was usually the custom in a *salon* when a great opinion aired itself on a great subject. 'Tis true in one of the smaller rooms they found a few Economists—among whom Walpole indicated to his young companion Dr. Quesnay, Madame de Pompadour's physician and the founder of the sect, Dupont de Nemours, and the youthful Turgot, who was to do more for their

principles than all of them, do it well and fail—listening in rapt attention to the Marquis de Mirabeau as he expounded his theory for converting the despotic monarchy of Richelieu and Louis XIV. into a feudal Utopia. Elsewhere, too, they found many people discussing the *Friend of Men*, that book which had made the Marquis famous and by whose title he was later to be called in ridicule. But to-night there was nothing but admiration expressed for the Marquis' *chef d'œuvre*, which had appeared in the previous year, and the popularity of which in the intellectual world had quite cast the latest literary achievements of Diderot, d'Alembert, and Rousseau into the shade.

But political economy, in spite of its novelty, was not of all-absorbing interest to the Comtesse de Rochefort's guests. There were many other lighter topics to agitate their love of sensation. Walpole and Montagu stopped for a moment to listen to the handsome Cardinal de Bernis, prelate, statesman, and *flaneur*, relating an adventure he had had some years before in Venice with Casanova, whose remarkable escape from prison in that city and arrival in Paris, where he was living under the protection of the rich and besotted old Duchesse d'Urfé, were the talk of the town. A few steps further on they joined a group who were trying to induce President Hénault to express an opinion on the constitutional struggle then proceeding between the Court and the Parlements. But that airy and garrulous magistrate was not to be inveigled into a discussion on such a subject.

"Perhaps, President of a Parlement though he is," whispered Walpole in Montagu's ear, "he is incapable of forming an opinion on this or any other serious question."

He related, however, with inimitable *esprit* some anecdotes on the centenarian Fontenelle, who had recently died.

Then the Englishmen joined a much larger group which had gathered around Bouton, who had commanded the troops in the Place de Grève during the execution of Damiens, an event that, even more than Damiens' attempt on the life of the King, had horrified all the *salons* of Paris. And Walpole and Montagu shuddered with the rest as Bouton graphically described all the hideous details of that public torture, of which Louis the Well-beloved himself had said that it was more worthy of Turkish than French justice. While everywhere, of course, the Englishmen heard the war discussed—the Seven Years' War—for which as yet patriotism, if no other motive, found nothing but sympathy. For though it was the year of Rosbach, that disgraceful battle had not yet occurred to damp the bellicose spirit of society.

After supper, for which even the Economists adjourned, and during which Billioni, the prima donna, sang an aria, and Clarival, the actor, recited one of the poems of the Duc de Nivernais, the entire assembly repaired to a saloon that had been temporarily converted into a theatre.

"Now, Montagu," said Walpole, "you will have the rare chance of seeing Madame de Rochefort, the Marquise de Mirepoix, and others of the highest fashion in *Le Bel Esprit du Temps*. It is the best of the Comte de Forcalquier's comedies."

"Who is he?" asked Montagu, as he slipped into the vacant seat beside Madame de Pailly, which she fondly hoped would have been claimed by the Marquis de Mirabeau. "His fame has not reached across the Channel."

"Forcalquier was the brother of the Comtesse de Rochefort," replied Walpole with the cynical gaiety which made him so popular in Paris. "His death some years ago in the flush of youth and mediocrity is the only grief she has ever known, and one of

her objects ever since has been to keep alive his reputation, which was acquired nobody knows how or why. Gifted with the kind of ability that can produce nothing, he made a great many nothings—songs, operas, romances, and comedies—which only society applauds because only society has heard of them. But judge for yourself; the curtain is rising."

The little piece, in which the fashionable players showed how skilfully they could utter epigrams made in cold blood, brought the *soirée* to an end. Immediately after the reappearance of Madame de Rochefort among her guests they began to withdraw. Walpole and Montagu, going in search of Madame du Deffand, with whom they were staying during their visit to Paris, found her with her hands pressed against her ears.

"Come, let us go," she said; "I have lost my sight and am in a fair way to lose my hearing with listening to *bons mots* strung like an abbess's beads. The Forcalquier wit reminds me of a rattle in the hands of a noisy child."

"He was certainly not economical in the use of it," laughed Walpole. "I should like to know what Madame de Rochefort's Economists think of the extravagance of *Le Bel Esprit du Temps?*"

"Economists?" she echoed. "Are there any? I have not met one to-night; I begin to think that they only exist in the imagination of the Marquis de Mirabeau."

"I trust not, madame," said a voice at her side.

It proceeded from a man of middle height, between forty and fifty. His forehead, from which the hair, grey and unpowdered, was brushed back *à la peruke*, was high and broad; his eyes were like wells filled with unfathomable pride; and a smile, half simpering, half scornful, played on his lips. In striking contrast with the splendid dress worn by the other men in

the room, his was extremely plain and sombre. Two decorations, however, glittered on his breast. He might once have been handsome, but his high-bred features now were shrunken and wrinkled with care or thought, or both.

"It is the 'Master' himself!" whispered Walpole.

Montagu, to whom the Friend of Men had been pointed out earlier in the evening, seeing him thus face to face, was struck by something almost Rhadamantine in the severity and lofty solemnity of his air.

"Marquis de Mirabeau," said Madame du Deffand mockingly, fixing her sightless eyes on him, "how goes the regeneration of France?"

"If you would let me convert you, it might succeed, madame," he replied with stiff gallantry.

"Pooh, it is a pose," she sneered, "like everything else. Everybody poses nowadays. Rousseau poses in sentiment, my d'Alembert in philosophy, and you in economy. We want more Voltaires. I don't believe in anything; no, not even in Louis Quinze. I knew the Regent. There was no posing in those days. Regenerate us back to the Regency and I will follow you."

And with her mocking laugh she passed on, escorted by her Englishmen, to take leave of Madame de Rochefort.

As was customary at these *soirées*, the Comtesse's most intimate friends remained for a while after the rest of the guests had gone. On this occasion the Marquis de Mirabeau had a special reason for remaining, and it was with a sense of satisfaction that he observed that only Madame de Pailly and the Duc de Nivernais had followed his example.

"Allow me, Comtesse," he said, with his habitual air of stately solemnity, when the four were alone, "to

congratulate you on a most successful *soirée*." And his lips puckered themselves into something which passed itself off for a smile.

"Yes, it was brilliant," she said, sinking into an armchair; "and I think my efforts in behalf of Economy are meeting with their reward. I have heard to-night nothing but praise of the *Friend of Men*. Madame de Mirepoix tells me that your book has quite converted the Dauphin. He calls it the 'breviary of honest men,' and declares he knows it by heart."

"What, all the twelve volumes?" exclaimed the Duc de Nivernais, with sarcasm worthy of a popular epigram. "I always knew that the mental capacity of his family differed from that of most of us."

This subtle thrust at the Bourbons brought a smile to the lips of the ladies. That of the beautiful Madame de Pailly was like a necklet of pearls in a coral casket—at least, so the poet Marivaux had described it in one of his characteristically affected couplets.

"The Dauphin has paid me a still greater compliment," said the Marquis, from whose deep, glazed eyes there flashed a gleam of pride. "He offered to-day to make me tutor to his sons."

"And you have accepted?" asked Madame de Pailly eagerly.

"No," sighed the Marquis; "I told him I could accept nothing less than the entire responsibility of their education."

"But how could he refuse after paying you such compliments? How did he dare?"

"He is the Dauphin, madame," said Nivernais maliciously.

"Of course, he could not do otherwise without first obtaining the King's consent," observed the Comtesse de Rochefort soothingly.

"But that would have been easy to obtain," exclaimed Madame de Pailly. "Is not Dr. Quesnay the physician

of Madame de Pompadour, and is she not able to influence the King? Surely Quesnay would be only too glad to help in that quarter. He is one of us."

"It is out of the question," said the Marquis proudly. "I will never bend the knee to the Pompadour in order to be *bien vu* at Court. They know well enough at Versailles the worth of the Mirabeaus. It is not of to-day that the Kings of France have had the chance of testing it. But they have never been willing to make use of our services. Perhaps they are afraid we should be too honest!"

The neglect with which his family, whose swords and lives had so often been broken in the King's cause, was treated in the highest places was a very sore subject with the Marquis. Nothing galled his haughty spirit more than the thought of the pensions, honours, and offices that had been showered on others, while only leaden bullets had rained on the Mirabeaus. He knew perfectly well that if his family had been willing to *enversaillé* themselves, as he contemptuously termed the servility with which so many nobles hung about the Court, they too might have risen high in the world. It was at no such price, however, that a Riqueti of Mirabeau would sell his independence. To think that he might have the noble office of educating a future King of France, of inculcating him with his friendship for humanity, of seeing his schemes for the regeneration of the country put into practice, of realising the dream of his life, if he would but sue for the favour of Madame de Pompadour! No, ten thousand times rather would he see France and the Mirabeaus perish than accomplish his ambition at such a cost!

The indignation he felt caused the veins on his broad, intellectual brow to swell; the blood mounted to his high cheek-bones, making them shine like two red knuckles; his mouth quivered; his eyes flashed with scorn and rage. The passion that shook him took ten

years from his looks. Something of the beauty for which he had been noted in his youth—the hereditary beauty of the Mirabeaus — and which deep thought, domestic worries, and time had withered, seemed restored to him.

"Mon pauvre Merlou!" murmured Madame de Pailly, extending to him a little hand as white as a white rose.

Merlou was a pet cat of the Comtesse de Rochefort's, whose name she and Madame de Pailly were wont in moments of intimate intercourse to bestow on the Marquis. When used by the latter it signified the sympathy of a kindred spirit.

The epithet had a soothing effect on the indignant Economist. He took Madame de Pailly's beautiful hand and sat down beside her.

"At any rate," she said, "the Dauphin's compliment is but another tribute to your reputation, of which you have had many of late." And she lightly touched the Order of Vasa, which, with the Cross of St. Louis, the Marquis was wearing.

"I have a riddle," said the Duc de Nivernais playfully. "Why is the Order of Vasa like the smile of the King of Sweden?"

"I am not good at riddles," sniffed the Marquis, who was in no mood for mirth, and whose vanity, at any time, would have prevented him from treating his decoration as a subject for a jest.

"Because he bestows them on everybody."

"My poor Duc!" protested the Comtesse de Rochefort languidly.

"And M. le Duc de Nivernais is a member of the Académie Française, the successor of the celebrated Massillon!" exclaimed Madame de Pailly, in a tone of affected surprise. "After this I agree with Madame du Deffand, who, when asked by an Englishman what the Academy was, said she believed it to be an '*espèce de guignol!*'"

"Ah, madame," retorted the Duc with a laugh, "she was thinking of the speech of which the Maréchal de Richelieu was delivered the day he became an Immortal. It was certainly droll for an Academician."

"It is true," said the Marquis, who utterly lacked the sense of humour, "had I only the King of Sweden to recognise me, I should consider myself a worthy object of ridicule. But the Grand Duke of Tuscany has adopted my scheme for supplying peasants with free ovens, and the Margrave of Baden, as you all know, calls himself my disciple. It is not the favour of princes, however, that I seek, but that of my fellow-men."

"We have only got to make Economy fashionable for you to succeed," remarked the Comtesse de Rochefort.

"If all your *soirées* are like to-night's, Comtesse, our object will be quickly achieved," said Nivernais gallantly.

"You have every reason to feel encouraged, Marquis," added Madame de Rochefort cheerfully. "You are on the road to regenerate not only France, but Europe. Louis Quinze, let us whisper it, cannot live for ever, and when the Dauphin is King——"

"Ah, when the Dauphin is King!" murmured Madame de Pailly, fixing a dreamy, sensuous gaze on the Marquis.

Something like a tear glistened in his eye.

"It is very sweet to be praised by one's friends," he sighed, "but it was not for that I came here to-night, Comtesse."

"Mon Dieu, Mirabeau!" exclaimed Nivernais, "have you been so foolish as to buy another estate? You know after your last experience you promised me to stop speculating in land."

"This is not a financial but a domestic trouble," said the Marquis in a tone of deep dejection.

"Mon pauvre Merlou!" murmured Madame de Pailly again, and she shot a quick, penetrating glance at him out of the corners of her eyes.

The little sketch that Walpole had drawn early in the evening of this woman for the beauty-struck Montagu failed in exactitude in one respect. It was Madame de Pailly as the world knew her, not as she knew herself. It was quite true, as Walpole had said, that she was an adventuress and the mistress, "decent" or otherwise, of the Marquis de Mirabeau. But Madame de Pailly was no ordinary adventuress and no ordinary mistress. Gifted with dazzling and seductive beauty, a masterful and brilliant mind, and a high-strung, artistic temperament, it was as natural for her to seek the world of rank and intellect as for the moth to seek the flame. But there was nothing of the moth in Madame de Pailly's nature. She was cautious and shrewd; she knew her limitations, and did not overreach herself. Many adventuresses in her place, having climbed into the Comtesse de Rochefort's *salon* and friendship, would have tried to climb out of them into something higher. Once, indeed, she tried to penetrate to St. Maur, where the Duchesse de Nivernais and her mother, the Marquise de Pontchartrain, received only the bluest-blooded pedigrees in France. But in spite of her friendship with the Comtesse de Rochefort the door to that select society remained closed to her. She did not repine, but wisely contented herself with the position she had won. A bird in the hand was always worth two in the bush to Madame de Pailly.

It was the same in her affairs of the heart. She took what the gods sent her and made the most of it. A lover was essential to her if she was to continue to be something more than the pet cat, the *chatte noire*, as they called her, in Madame de Rochefort's *salon*. Far from damaging her reputation, a lover would enhance it, always provided that her lover's wife made no public scandal. But Madame de Pailly's passions were purely intellectual, she had not the slightest inclination to be a courtesan. Nature had fitted her not for the *rôle*

of a Pompadour, but for that of an Egeria. Her ambition was to be the Madame du Châtelet to some Voltaire, the platonic mistress of a man of genius who would be entirely under her influence and whose fame she would make it the object of her life to achieve. In Madame de Rochefort's *salon* the only man who appeared suitable for her purpose was the Marquis de Mirabeau. Over forty and old for his age, crotchety, irascible, pedantic, and expressing a contempt for women, he was hardly the sort of man, one would have thought, to appeal to a woman of thirty in the full flush of health and beauty. She deemed it, however, sufficient that he was the celebrated author of the *Friend of Men* and the acknowledged leader of the Economists. The tools appeared worthy of her hands. Perhaps, too, the difficulty of using them appealed to her. Having slain the first lion at the gate, the Marquis' indifference to feminine charms, she had to encounter another in his wife. There were three or four lions and a couple of tigers caged up in the Marquise de Mirabeau. She was always threatening, in the many violent quarrels she had with her husband, to make his connection with Madame de Pailly a public scandal, and she was quite capable of doing so, even though she suffered herself.

In her endeavour to win the Marquis' affections Madame de Pailly's had themselves been conquered, and she feared nothing so much as a scandal in which she stood to lose not only her social position but her happiness. Struck by the Marquis' unusual depression of spirits and the tone of despair in which he admitted that the trouble of which he spoke was domestic, Madame de Pailly at once jumped to the conclusion that the Marquise de Mirabeau had at last put her oft-repeated threat into execution. The thought made the blood leave her cheeks, and her breasts fluttered under the frill of Valenciennes lace that fringed her low-cut corsage, like two milk-white doves caught in a veil of gauze.

Her emotion, however, escaped notice. For the Marquis had risen suddenly to his feet, and to the astonishment of both the Comtesse and the Duc paced the room agitatedly.

"Well, Mirabeau, what is it?" said Nivernais quietly after a little pause.

"Poisson has failed me!" cried the Marquis with a gesture of despair, halting in front of the Duc. "If there was a man capable of managing that ungovernable son of mine I thought it was Poisson."

A sigh of relief escaped from Madame de Pailly's lips.

"It is your son, then, who has so upset you, Merlou?" she said.

"Yes, it is my son, madame; my son, with whom I can do nothing," groaned the Marquis. "When I appointed Poisson as his tutor I thought he would be sure to manage him. Poisson was my steward and a most superior man; he is, in fact, the soul and spring of all I am worth. He had, moreover, two sons of his own, patterns of propriety, and he knew the hopes I built on Gabriel, of the determination I formed at his birth to mould him into my image, so that when he grew up he might help me regenerate France, and after my death continue my work. At first, under Poisson's care, the creature promised well. Do you remember that letter he wrote when he was but five? He addressed it to himself, to 'Monsieur Moi.' When I read it I felt as if I had begotten a genius. It was quite extempore and full of the most sagacious advice. 'A high heart under his jacket!' I thought. But it was not long before he began to exhibit the vile traits of his mother's family, for he is all Vassan. I can discover nothing of the Mirabeaus in him. His nature is as ugly as his face, which his mother spoilt by the ointments she put on his ulcers when he had the small-pox, in spite of the doctor's remonstrance."

"But what has the boy done, Mirabeau? You have not told us what he has done," said Nivernais.

"Done! What hasn't he done? I could not begin to relate the list of his enormities. He has wheedled himself in Poisson's affection to such an extent that I have caught Poisson concealing his offences. When I reproached him for this he even dared to defend the boy, so, of course, I have been obliged to dismiss him. I have sent him to look after an estate I have in Limousin, for the man loves me like a dog, and therefore I must not ruin him; otherwise, as the Friend of Men, what would the world say of me? And now what am I to do with Gabriel?"

"Why not educate him yourself?" suggested Madame de Rochefort.

"What!" exclaimed the Marquis. "Take him entirely under my care! Picture me, Comtesse, if you can, with such a son tied to my waist. I should either go mad or fling him into the first river I found!"

"What a pity," said Madame de Pailly, cleverly playing up to the Marquis' well-known preference for his younger son, "that Boniface was not the elder. It was Gabriel who should have been a Knight of Malta; he seems cut out for a captain-general of the galleys."

"God grant that he may not have to row in them one day," replied the Marquis.

"Take care lest you make a criminal of him instead of a great man, Mirabeau," remarked the Duc de Nivernais seriously. "Your system is wrong. The boy has fine qualities; let them develop naturally. Don't crush and twist them, as you are doing by all this severity and espionage. Put Gabriel on his honour and make a friend of him."

"I do not believe that fathers should be the comrades of their sons," said the Marquis stiffly. "That is the way parents lose their authority. Have we not got examples of this around us every day?"

"No doubt," returned the Duc; "but it is the fault of the parents. The worst possible influence to which one

can expose a boy is to suspect him of an intention to deceive. Flog Gabriel as much as you like, but——"

"I do," said the Marquis, "every day."

"But trust him. A kind word will go a long way with that ugly son of yours, Mirabeau. I have seen it melt him to tears."

"It was but a trick to wheedle himself into your confidence; he has learnt the wiles of the Old Serpent. Indeed, he is so depraved that, remembering the incidents connected with his birth, I sometimes wonder if he is really human after all. If I could have foreseen what he would become I would have let Nature take its course."

The Marquis alluded to a secret imparted to him by the Duc de Nivernais before Gabriel's birth, by which the masculinity of the child with which his wife was *enceinte* might be assured. It was one of those quack experiments in chemistry rife in France after the publication of the *Encyclopédie* which imposed on men even of the Duc de Nivernais' common-sense. The Marquis had been only too willing to be gulled by it in his passion for an heir, and as Gabriel chanced to be born shortly after he tried the experiment, his faith in Nivernais' secret was so firm that it is doubtful if it was shaken when a son-in-law, to whom he imparted it some years later, tried it with deplorable results.

"This son of mine, who has you, Duc, to thank for his existence," he continued agitatedly, "was unnatural from his birth. The midwife on announcing to me my wife's delivery begged me not to be afraid. I knew not whether to be alarmed or to rejoice when I beheld what they told me was my heir. He seemed to be nothing but a head—a monstrous head. On examining more closely, I discovered that the deafening noise that issued from his mouth, in which two teeth were already cut——"

"Like Louis XIV.," smiled the Comtesse de Rochefort, who had more than once heard the eccentric Marquis relate these details.

"Was caused," he proceeded without pausing, but he acknowledged the Comtesse's flattering comparison with a bow, "by the doctor's attempt to straighten, while the ligaments were still supple, one of his feet which had been twisted in the delivery. Nor was I less astonished when, remarking on the strength of his lungs, I was assured that he was born with his tongue literally tied to the natal cord! Had I been a superstitious man I should have regarded this monstrous conception as a portent."

"Perhaps he is," said Nivernais; "my secret may have brought you more luck than you think."

"And the nurse you gave him was even more singular," remarked the Comtesse; "I remember the first time I saw them. Gabriel couldn't have been more than a year at the time. He was beating her, and she was giving him blow for blow. Each seemed to see who could hit the hardest."

"She was an excellent woman," said the Marquis, "hale and robust, the widow of a farrier, whose forge she kept. For having had two husbands and finding that they did not last, she refused to take a third. She has well brought up a litter of children, paid her husband's debts, and reared flocks of geese that would have taught a Prussian soldier how to drill and cows capable of passing an examination on inoculation, all the while striking on her anvil as a pastime, under the impression, she said, that it lengthened her arms."

"I told you she was singular," laughed the Comtesse.

"At least it was better than winnowing oats, as Dulcinea did at the audience she gave Sancho Panza," put in Nivernais.

The conversation, which had drifted from what was to be done with Gabriel into pointless reminiscences on his infancy, was now brought back to the original question by Madame de Pailly, who wished to express her opinion.

"So Poisson," she said, "has quite failed with Gabriel. Why not send him to a boarding-school? I have no doubt with a little trouble we can find just the school and the master to answer your purpose."

The suggestion, conveying as it did an idea of severity, appealed favourably to the Marquis.

"I know the very man," he said. "The Abbé Choquard. His military academy for the sons of noblemen is said to be a veritable house of correction."

"It seems the only way out of your dilemma," she rejoined, glancing at the Duc and Comtesse as if for approval of this opinion. "In such a place, if Gabriel does not improve he never will."

In reality, Madame de Pailly took not the least interest in the boy. He was nothing to her but a very ugly, slovenly, impertinent child, who on the few occasions she had met him had shown a violent antipathy to her, which had been prompted, no doubt, by his mother. But he happened to be the heir of the Riquetis of Mirabeau, and as such of quite as much importance to the Marquis as his schemes for the regeneration of France; consequently in her *rôle* of Egeria to a man of genius, Madame de Pailly was only too ready to feign an interest in his son. Moreover, she was quite aware of the affection that the Marquise de Mirabeau had for her eldest son, and the idea of separating them gave her a peculiar feminine satisfaction.

Her suggestion, however, did not meet with the support she hoped.

"I have no doubt, Marquis," said Madame de Rochefort, whose heart was gentleness itself, "that Gabriel is very troublesome, but surely his vices, as you call them, cannot be deeply rooted at his age. He is only eight, isn't he?"

The Marquis inclined his head.

"It seems too drastic to send one so young away from home," she went on. "Given the nature you say he

possesses, the influences to which he will be exposed at a boarding-school may be such as to quite defeat your object. Give Gabriel another chance, Marquis."

"Perhaps the Comtesse is right, Merlou," said Madame de Pailly, artfully adding, as if the thought had just occurred to her, "besides, the Marquise de Mirabeau may object to be parted from her son."

The words, as they were meant to do, goaded the Marquis like a spur.

"There," he cried passionately, "you have hit upon the chief difficulty that confronts me in the training of my son. It is my wife who stands between me and all my plans. Poisson would not have failed but for her. It was she who discounted his discipline by encouraging Gabriel to disobey me. Her influence is paramount over the beast, and it is diametrically opposed to mine. It is my wife who is the cause of all my troubles. She has destroyed all my authority and made me a laughing-stock to my children and servants! What am I to do?"

"Mon pauvre Merlou!" murmured Madame de Pailly.

"Come, come, Mirabeau," said Nivernais, "let us stick to the point. It is not your wife but your son that we were discussing. You have tried severity with the boy and it has failed; now try kindness and see how it works. He is not so vicious as you fancy, or I am no judge of character. Why, the other day when you let him stay with me at St. Maur for the sports which I give my peasants every year, he won a hat in a race between boys under ten and old men over sixty. I had no sooner given him the prize than, turning to an old peasant whom he had defeated, he snatched off the fellow's cap, and offering him the hat he had just won, 'Here,' said he, 'take this; I have not two heads!' Something divine illuminated his extraordinarily ugly face, and at that moment he appeared to me like the Emperor of the world. I was affected to tears. Believe me, Mirabeau, with kindness you can do anything with that boy."

The sincerity and conviction of the Duc de Nivernais were not without effect on the Marquis.

"Ah! you and Madame de Rochefort do not know the boy whose cause you plead as I do," he said thoughtfully.

"What were you at his age, Marquis?" said Madame de Rochefort. "Were you any more promising?"

"I?" said the Marquis. "At three I preached, at six I was a prodigy, at Gabriel's age I was an object of hope, at twenty a fire-ship, at thirty a political economist, and now——"

"A good sort of a man," said the Comtesse playfully.

"Yes, madame," he replied with ludicrous solemnity, "and I pride myself on it up to the last notch."

"Well, well," laughed Nivernais, "the difference between you and Gabriel so far is not so great after all. You preached at three, he wrote letters to Monsieur Moi full of sagacious advice at five. At six you were a prodigy, he was a portent at his birth. At his age you were an object of hope, so is he. I believe in the boy. You must be patient, Mirabeau."

Softened, but by no means convinced, the Marquis turned to Madame de Pailly.

She was too clever to run the risk of antagonising such persons as Madame de Rochefort and the Duc de Nivernais for the sake of carrying a point to which they were so manifestly opposed. It would but be playing into the Marquise de Mirabeau's hands. But there was a way of influencing the Marquis and falling in gracefully with the Nivernais point of view without abandoning her intention to part the Marquise and Gabriel. The Marquis had a brother in Provence to whom he was devoted, and for whom Nivernais and Madame de Rochefort had the greatest respect. If she advised him to do nothing without consulting this brother, she would get the support of the others, while with skill the brother, into whose good graces she was anxious to

worm herself, might be brought round to her views on the subject of Gabriel's education. As for the Marquis, whom she saw every day, he, she well knew, could soon be made to tire of kindness, even if he ever got so far as to show it to his son.

"What have we all been thinking about," she said, rising to depart, "that we should forget the Bailli de Mirabeau? His is the advice you want; it is sure to be sound, and you know you never decide on anything without consulting him."

"Of course," exclaimed Madame de Rochefort, "how could we forget the Bailli?"

"True," echoed Nivernais; "the Bailli is the man to advise you, Mirabeau."

"I had not forgotten him," said the Marquis, "but he is so far away and the matter is urgent. Well, as you are all unanimous, I will let the Bailli decide what is to be done with Gabriel."

"Au revoir, Comtesse," smiled Madame de Pailly.

And giving her hand to the others to kiss, she quickly withdrew at what she perceived was the psychological moment of the situation.

CHAPTER II

QUIXOTE-BRUTUS RIQUETI

THE Marquis de Mirabeau—as might be expected of a parent who could magnify into abnormal depravity the shortcomings of a refractory child of eight—was bizarre.

The term, though not altogether apt, nevertheless has the advantage of raising him above the level of the commonplace. He stood on a plane apart from other men; in the category to which he belonged he was the sole specimen; his type was quite unique. In character he was one of those men who seem only capable of description in adjectives, which is generally the sign of a personality hard to define. The number and variety applied to him had struck every note in the gamut of praise and condemnation. When Gabriel was born the adjectives were pretty equally divided between approbation and censure, but as time went by men had eliminated the former and expressed only the latter in the superlative degree. This was chiefly the result of a confirmed habit of regarding the faults of others as his personal misfortunes, and attributing his own faults, which he seldom acknowledged, to the misfortunes of his family. He could never conceive the possibility of being mistaken in anything.

At the outset of his career he had formed two objects, two ideals, which he pursued with the hereditary stubbornness of the Riquetis. One was the regeneration of

France, the other to beget an heir who should help him in his task and continue his race, of which he was inordinately proud. At the age of seventeen, when both of these ideas first began to germinate in his head, his father, who was devoted to the military profession—in following which he had received a wound that obliged him to wear a silver stock, or *col d'argent*, a nickname by which he was ever afterwards known—procured him a commission in the army. There was no career for which the boy had a greater aversion, but as he had been trained to stand in the greatest awe of his father, he submitted to his wishes without a murmur.

One day, four years later, when he was one-and-twenty, the news was brought to him in some garrison town in which he was silently eating out his heart that his father was dead, and that he, Victor Riqueti, a mere subaltern in a marching regiment, was Marquis de Mirabeau. In that moment a great joy dashed whatever grief he felt. The opportunity had come at last of relinquishing his sword! But war had just been declared. It was out of the question that at such an hour a Riqueti of all men should desert his King and country. The war lasted six years—six weary years to the young Marquis de Mirabeau, burning to regenerate France and beget an heir. A strong sense of duty, however, and the remarkable tenacity of his character, kept him at his post. He saw considerable active service, was slightly wounded, mentioned in despatches, and retired on the declaration of peace with the Cross of St. Louis.

His first step when he finally found himself free was to proceed to his ancestral castle of Mirabeau, in Provence, where his presence was urgently required. Here, he thought, he could finally settle down, and in the rest and quiet of a rural life realise his all-absorbing ideals. But disappointment awaited him again. He had come home not to a life of wealth and ease but to one of poverty and drudgery. His father had left a fortune crippled by a

magnificent and eccentric mode of life. When the legacies and claims were paid the Marquis de Mirabeau found himself heir to little more than a family greatly infatuated with its name. Col d'Argent, however, had been careful to provide for his widow, whom he had married romantically *sans dot.* She inherited as a first claim on his estate an annuity of four thousand livres. With her assistance the Marquis was able to untangle what was left of his inheritance, and by practising the greatest economy he found himself within a year in a position to support his title with dignity. It seemed as if his longed-for opportunity had come at last.

But life in Provence no longer appealed to him. He saw that it offered duties which, being a conscientious man, he would be obliged to perform. It meant that he would have to consult bailiffs, meet creditors, visit peasants, inspect farms, dispense justice from morning to night. What, he with his burning ideals become a gentleman-farmer, a mere country squire! He had a younger brother, between whom and himself there existed a great friendship, a staid, serious man, who had served in the navy and was now Governor of Guadeloupe, in the French West Indies. This brother, whose health had been impaired by the tropical climate, was returning to France.

"Why," thought the Marquis, "shouldn't he take my place at Mirabeau? He is my next of kin; he will be the head of the family should I die childless. His interests in the estate are as great as mine; its claim on him is the same as on me. It does not matter which of us remains here."

Considering the feudal, even patriarchal importance that the Mirabeaus, and especially this one, had ever attached to the headship of the family, there was something sophistical, something quite un-Riqueti-like, in his reasoning. But then he was the first of the line to have burning ideals, and their flame, so long battened down

under the hatches of honour, duty, and conscience, had now burst forth and set him all ablaze.

The Governor of Guadeloupe readily agreed to his brother's proposal and settled down in the ancestral castle as the Marquis' representative, to be known henceforth as the Bailli de Mirabeau; while the Marquis, lured Paris-ward by ambition, purchased a small property at Bignon, near Nemours, and that he might enjoy the advantages of the best intellectual society in Europe, which to a man burning to regenerate France was necessary, he took a house in the capital as well.

"Between Bignon and Paris," he told the Bailli, with the strange euphuistic pedantry that was not the least remarkable trait of his character, "I shall obtain the intellectual nutriment which is so necessary to me during my literary gestation." And the sympathetic Bailli thoroughly agreed.

So behold the last obstacle in the path of the Marquis de Mirabeau surmounted and the road open before him, the road to glory and the Ideal. How joyfully, how proudly he sets out upon it, and what a figure he cuts! 'Tis a sight to wake the old Riquetis who sleep side by side in their sculptured tombs at Mirabeau on the Durance. Sir Friend of Men mounted on an Ideal, and all glittering in feudal panoply, riding down the eighteenth century to right the wrong! A Riqueti turned knight-errant, a Don Quixote fighting windmills!

And the Squire, the Sancho Panza, where is he? He, too, is necessary—even of supreme importance to this extraordinary man.

"I must beget him," said the Marquis de Mirabeau.

The choice of a wife was a matter of great concern to him. It was a boast of the family that they had never made a mistake in choosing their wives. But heretofore the Riquetis had always formed an idea of the sort of women they wished to marry; in this instance the Marquis had no idea at all. He did not like women, and

would have so much preferred not to marry—but stay, there *was* one thing that he knew he wanted in a wife. It was money.

"In marrying," he told his mother and brother, "it is absolutely necessary that I find a rich wife. I have the fortune of my family to retrieve. Besides, money will greatly assist me in proving to the nation my theory of national regeneration."

Neither to them nor to him did it ever occur that an heiress might refuse to bestow her wealth on a man who had nothing to offer in exchange but the honour of an alliance with a family who attached an exaggerated importance to their pedigree. Refuse a Riqueti? It was inconceivable. A princess of the House of France could scarcely make a better choice! His inordinate pride, however, made him shun the proposal that he should seek his wife from one of the great Court families, whose influence might help him on in the world. He considered the Riquetis the peers of any family in France, but they had never humbled themselves to any one for favours, and he certainly would not be the first to do so.

Holding these views on the subject of a rich wife, before he quitted Provence he cast his eye haughtily over the *noblesse* with whom he was acquainted and found a girl who seemed to answer his purpose. She was a young widow, by no means beautiful, who had been married at the age of twelve, after the usual conventional fashion, to a Marquis de Saulvebœuf, who had died without consummating the marriage. Six years had elapsed since her husband's death, and Madame de Saulvebœuf had continued to live with her parents, to whom she was deeply attached, and from one of whom, her mother, she had great expectations. The Marquise de Vassan, in fact, was one of the richest women in the South of France, and possessed of a character, had the Marquis de Mirabeau but known it, to make most men think twice before choosing her for a mother-in-law. This was the

reason, perhaps, why her daughter had waited so long for a second husband. But the Marquis de Mirabeau, who could read character as little as he understood human nature, dazzled by Madame de Vassan's great wealth, let greed guide him. The proposals for this alliance were made in the ordinary conventional way, and in due course the Marquise de Saulvebœuf changed her name to that of Marquise de Mirabeau.

"And now," thought the Marquis, "I can settle down in earnest to regenerate France and beget my heir."

With all the advantages of youth—for he was but thirty at the time of his marriage—birth, fortune, brains, surely one's dreams might come true?

The tapestry of life, as the Marquis de Mirabeau meant to weave it, was not a grotesque conception, though by the tangling of the threads it proved so in the end. His pattern was one that any high-spirited, romantic, earnest, and gifted young man might have designed. That a man has a pattern at all is praiseworthy—in the case of the Marquis, born and bred in an age of incredible folly, it was almost sublime. That he should have begun to think of it at seventeen and never abandon the idea of executing it in the face of the obstacles fate and his sense of duty had put in his way, raises him somewhat above the level of similar young men. If not a genius he was at least of the caste.

An innate spirit of independence inherited from his proud ancestors, who had always a dash of republicanism in them—the haughty republicanism of antiquity which was reincarnated in Italy after the fall of the Roman Empire—fired him with a hatred of the tyranny which the policy of Richelieu and Louis XIV. had placed on the neck of France, like the yoke of Tarquin on the neck of Rome. During his military experiences he had come into close contact with the class from whom were recruited the courtiers, the Ministers, the generals—in a word, those who directed the affairs of the nation.

While in Provence he had had daily evidences of the effect of their abuse of power, their corruption, cynicism, irreligion, and utter irresponsibility and inefficiency. The glitter of Versailles, which so bedazzled the eyes of Europe, did not deceive the Marquis. It was to him like the burning of the oils in a witch's cauldron. By the flicker of the flame it seemed to him that France was in the position of a man held up by a gang of bandits who mean to have both his money and his life. To the Don Quixote stalking along the highway of the eighteenth century here was a villainy to punish, a wrong to redress, a chivalry to perform. To the rescue then! And the descendant of the fearless republican Riquetis, who had been Ghibellines in Florence and First Consuls in Marseilles, drew, not his sword—the day of sword-drawing was past—but his pen!

"In my hands," said the Marquis, "it shall be a Thor's Hammer, an Excalibur! France shall be saved by the inkstand. The bandits shall be frightened off with liberty and the wounds they have inflicted healed with ink!"

By ink the Marquis meant his *Friend of Men*, that had been germinating in his brain for years. By liberty he meant the theory it contained, a theory that may be briefly described as philanthropic feudalism. In France, when saved according to the Marquis de Mirabeau, the King was to be the father of the people, a sacred, rather mythical being, whose attributes were mercy and justice; the nobles and clergy were to be his representatives, and to be venerated only so long as they performed their duties; the people were to be sheep following their shepherds; every peasant was to have a fowl in his pot; agriculture was to be fostered, land was to be taxed, trade was to be untrammelled. The reiteration of this theory in as many books and pamphlets as he could write was what the Marquis termed literature.

The publication of the *Friend of Men* made him

famous not only in France but in Europe, and surely if ever perseverance deserved to be rewarded it would be a mean nature that would grudge him the reputation he earned. After a gestation of twenty years, so great was the travail of this book's birth that it may be said to have been cut from him, so to speak, by a Cæsarean operation. For a moment the Marquis's object seemed about to be attained. Abroad, two benevolent despots actually put his theories into practice in their dominions. At home, several great landlords emulated their example; the Marquis himself had already created a Utopia on his own property; the Dauphin was converted; and there was a hope among the Economists that Madame de Pompadour might be brought to utter the magic word that should regenerate all France. But the Dauphin died prematurely, and Madame de Pompadour preferred a Seven Years' War to Mirabeausophy. "Back to Feudalism" could not be made a popular catchword. The lion of despotism and the lamb of the Rights of Man refused to lie down together *à la Marquis de Mirabeau.*

His next effort to realise his ideal sent him to the Bastille! But the terror of this prison had ceased for the nobility; Voltaire and the Philosophers had mocked it away. It was only the shell which had contained its terror that the people thirty years later destroyed. The Marquis whiled away the tedium of his confinement with Marcus Aurelius, the Wisdom of Solomon, and a little book of provincial proverbs, which he considered "very jovial and, above all, instructive." At the end of five days the Duc de Nivernais procured his release, and he was exiled to Bignon for three months. This compulsory absence from Paris at a time when everybody was talking about him troubled him much more than the Bastille.

"You might as well give a starving man a nosegay instead of a good dinner, or a pair of stays to one of the King of Prussia's grenadiers," he complained in his

characteristic way to the Comtesse de Rochefort, who sent him a token of friendship. "To be truthful, the weather is not that of May. The birds are silent, the swallows have not come, nor do the wild geese fly so high as to be unable to distinguish the difference between a courtier and an honest man. What more shall I add? I say so many things that in the end I shall be burned alive."

He had, however, the presence of Madame de Pailly in the neighbourhood to console him.

Thus ended the Marquis de Mirabeau's attempts to regenerate France; he merely contented himself henceforth with prophesying the Revolution. He was to die three days before it began!

And how fared he with his second ideal, which he set himself to realise simultaneously with the first?

From the subserviency he had shown to his father he had conceived an exaggerated sense of the authority of the head of the family. His was to be a model family, as should become a saviour of France. So he took Brutus as his model. The Marquis de Mirabeau as Brutus was even more curious a sight than the Marquis de Mirabeau as Don Quixote. To insure obedience it was necessary that Brutus should be firm from the start, and he began at once to place his wife under a heavy yoke: the yoke of the imperious husband as he had seen it borne by his mother—forgetting, however, to cover the yoke with love, as Col d'Argent had done. When his children arrived he intended to place the yoke on them, too: the yoke of both parents as he had worn it, for never had a son been more submissive to a father or more courteous to a mother than he.

The Marquis, however, failed to take the character of the woman he had married into account. Such negligence is one of the chances in the matrimonial lottery, but in

the case of the Marquis it was less an accident than an error, an irreparable error of perception. In the formal courtship of a *mariage de convenance* it is much easier for the contracting parties to form an accurate estimate of one another's characters and temperaments than when the preliminaries to wedlock are veiled by love. But the Marquis de Mirabeau, hooded in his mantle of egoism, having made up his mind to marry the daughter of the rich Marquise de Vassan, never gave a thought to the character of his future wife. In his *rôle* of Brutus, if he anticipated a show of opposition he felt perfectly confident of crushing it.

It was on the journey to Bignon, whither the couple went immediately after the wedding, that the Marquise de Mirabeau first learnt her husband's plans for the future. It seemed to her that she had never before listened to such a ridiculous farrago, and she punctuated the economic theory of the yet-to-be-written *Friend of Men* with yawns. But when the Marquis, offended by her seeming lack of respect, proceeded to unfold his views in regard to the conduct of his family, the Marquise stopped yawning and gave her singular husband her undivided attention.

"So," she thought, with difficulty concealing her scorn, "this is the man I have married. Well, my friend, the sooner you understand your wife the better."

In such a mood a bride on her wedding journey does not lack opportunities of illuminating her husband as to her character, but the Marquise de Mirabeau preferred to reserve her lightning till she arrived at Bignon. Here in the country-house he had bought the year before his marriage the Marquis had installed his mother as mistress —a position that out of his great regard for her he wished her to retain. She was a very beautiful old lady, proud as Lucifer, strait-laced as a Puritan, and, from being accustomed all her life to be treated with the greatest deference, very exacting. Nature seemed to have specially

created her to play the *rôle* of the mother of Brutus. But her figure, as the Marquis had already begun to weave it into his life's tapestry, resembled rather that of the Madonnas of the old masters—a Madonna wearing a halo and seated on a throne, before which, like a painted saint, her son knelt every evening to receive her blessing. In a word, his mother was to the Marquis de Mirabeau quite sacred, and all the religious faith that the philosophy and scepticism of the eighteenth century had left him was centred in her.

What a profanation was it to him, then, to hear his bride, on the very day of her arrival at Bignon, announce to the Marquise Dowager that she, the Marquise regnant, was henceforth to be the real mistress of the establishment! That a man who essayed to play the *rôle* of Brutus in his family should quietly put up with such an act of open defiance from his wife was out of the question. At first, so unexpected was the attack, the Marquis was stricken dumb with amazement, but he got over the shock and engaged in a fierce battle-royal with his wife when he beheld his mother haughtily preparing to pack her trunks. But though Brutus issued from this encounter victorious, his *amour propre* had received a hurt from which it never wholly recovered. The presence of his mother, who on his passionate appeal continued to reside at Bignon, perpetually reminded him, by the frequent and bitter quarrels it excited between himself and his wife, that for the first time in the history of his race a Riqueti had made a mistake in choosing a wife.

For the Marquise de Mirabeau's resistance to her Brutus became more and more formidable and aggressive. In the conflict of two egos for supremacy, resistance knows only how to use the weapons of offence. Those in the armoury of the Marquis were of little effect compared to one that the Marquise possessed—her own mother. The power of Madame de Vassan quickly made itself felt in a way in which the Marquis de Mirabeau

had never dreamt of. To his dismay he discovered when too late that he had been tricked out of his wife's *dot.* In the marriage settlement Madame de Vassan had craftily managed to avoid the payment of her daughter's dowry till her own death. As she was a tough and terrible old termagant with a long lease of life, it was she who became, by virtue of her purse, the real mistress of the house of Brutus. Flitting to and from Bignon like a stormy petrel, it was her delight to sow dissension and to fan the flame of discord by encouraging her daughter to laugh her husband's proud pretensions and ideals to scorn. He was thus changed from a Brutus into a Petruchio—a Petruchio who did not know how to tame his Kate.

Unlike the Marquis, it never occurred to his wife to regard the future as a loom on which the tapestry of her life was to be woven. She had never dreamt of playing any *rôle,* of imitating any model, of designing any pattern. Life was to her just what the hour contained, nothing more. For the Marquise de Mirabeau, though possessed of an individuality as wilful as her husband's, was essentially shallow. She had but one thought, one care, one desire—to have her own way in everything. To oppose her was to stiffen her obstinacy, to attempt to crush her was to goad her to fury. Had the Marquis possessed all the tact, patience, and consideration in the world, he could have made nothing of her. He went on, nevertheless, in his stubborn Riqueti fashion weaving his tapestry, while she, not being able to prevent him, sat down perforce beside him at the loom, not to spin in a corner of it a web after some pattern of her own inventing, but to unravel or tangle all the threads in his.

For the rest, apart from her dauntless determination to maintain her will against every effort of her husband to break it, the Marquise de Mirabeau was slovenly, idle, uneducated, sensual, and emotional; a female wastrel,

as it were, comparable not to Xantippe, as the Marquis was ever complaining to his friends, but to a fungus of the vegetable world that kills the tree on which it grows. Mated to some peasant, she would have brawled in his house and been the scandal of his village. But chance, by some freak of destiny, had given her an ancient lineage and yoked her to a haughty, pedantic, impatient dreamer of philosophic dreams, whose life she wrecked as a ship is wrecked on a reef on which it has sailed unawares.

Such were the conditions, then, under which the Marquis de Mirabeau at last settled down to attain the two great objects of his career—the regeneration of France and the begetting of an heir.

In regard to the latter, at all events, the Marquise was in perfect accord with her husband, helping him, not, it is true, from his lofty point of view, but from an incontinent sexuality that she bequeathed in particular to her eldest son. In all, eleven children were born to this curious and ill-assorted pair—eleven truces in their life-long war. Of these attempts at peace all were futile. Six, so to speak, were never ratified—they perished almost as soon as they were conceived. The other five seemed to survive merely to afford fresh causes of conflict. These five faggots, to name them in the order in which they were flung on to the domestic hearth at Bignon, were Marianne, Caroline, Gabriel, Boniface, and Louise.

To complete the Marquis's family circle, circumstances too important to be overlooked one day added the German widow of his youngest brother. Riqueti *tout à fait*, the Chevalier de Mirabeau, as he was called, had manifested the family traits, especially their spirit of independence, in a fashion that had given the Marquis the greatest offence. The brothers, who had entered the army together, had long been estranged by the differences which so often occur in families between the eldest and the youngest son ; but it was not till the death of their

father that their mutual resentment blazed into an open quarrel. The immediate cause of the rupture was a question of money. The Chevalier saw fit to consider himself badly treated in his father's will, and he accused his brothers of having cheated him out of his proper share. To the Marquis this charge was particularly odious, for with old Col d'Argent's debts, mortgages, and legacies to pay, and a title to keep up, he was really worse off than either the Bailli or the Chevalier, who both received fifteen hundred livres in cash and were provided with careers in which the name of Mirabeau might reasonably be expected to count for something. This dispute would, no doubt, have eventually been adjusted, for the Riquetis were very clannish ; but the Chevalier at the height of his quarrel married Mademoiselle Navarre, an actress who had been the mistress of many men, and with whom he had fallen wildly in love. The Marquis, exasperated beyond all bounds by this *mésalliance*, which he, the Bailli, and their mother deemed an indelible stain on the family honour, demanded and obtained an order for the Chevalier's arrest. He, however, dreading the vengeance of his brother less than that of his Commander-in-Chief, the Maréchal de Saxe, from whose harem he had ravished the favourite sultana, very wisely fled the country. The Mirabeaus hereupon resolved to obliterate from their memory all recollection of the black sheep of their family. But it is impossible for men to forget those who have wounded their vanity. From time to time rumours of the Chevalier reached Bignon, and aroused conflicting emotions in the Marquis. First there came the news of the death of the Chevalier's wife ; then of royal favour he had won—the favour of the Margrave of Baireuth, the Prince who had married Wilhelmina, Frederick the Great's favourite sister, Egeria, and *alter ego*.

"The *mauvais sujet* of our family," wrote the Marquis one day to the Bailli, "has become grand chamberlain

and privy councillor at the Court of Baireuth ! What ? You don't believe me ? Now open your eyes wide. He has actually arrived in Paris charged with a very important mission by—whom do you think ?—the King of Prussia ! I have seen Germanicus, I have spoken to him, I have forgiven him. He has married a little German patrician with not a sou, but well *dotée* with quarterings. A white, blonde, gentle little creature. And it was but yesterday that he ruined himself by bringing dung into the house of the Mirabeaus ! Is it not like a chapter in the life of an adventurer ? "

When one has a brother in the confidence of a Frederick the Great and a Margravine of Baireuth, there lives not the man but must feel proud of him. As may be surmised from the romance of his first marriage, the Chevalier de Mirabeau had a generous and impulsive nature. He had long since forgotten and forgiven his real and imaginary wrongs, and on arriving in Paris he at once sought out the Marquis and pleaded for a reconciliation. This was not difficult to effect now, and the Chevalier had gone back to Germany on the best of terms with his mother and brothers. Thus it was, on learning of his death shortly afterwards, that the Marquis came to offer his widow a home at Bignon.

In this tempestuous family the little German Countess, though in reality as colourless and inoffensive as she seemed, was, like all the others, a disturbing element. Her very gentleness, while it won her the respect of the Marquis, invisibly thwarted his authority. For her almost shadowy presence, by keeping alive the memory of the melodramatic career of her husband, served, quite unconsciously, to feed the imagination of the unmanageable Gabriel in the same manner as a sensational story of adventure feeds the susceptible fancy of a boy, and tempted him in the end to out-chevalier the Chevalier, whom his father was ever angrily telling him he resembled in character as well as looks.

Such was the home of which all that was Brutus in the Marquis de Mirabeau struggled to be master. It was a household that indelibly impressed itself on the memory of all who crossed its threshold—a household, like France, unable to regenerate itself and drifting irresistibly towards revolution.

CHAPTER III

"ALL VASSAN"

THE Bailli, to Madame de Pailly's chagrin, had strongly opposed sending Gabriel to Choquard's. "No doubt," he wrote his brother from the distant Château de Mirabeau, "Choquard would turn him out creditably; I am told that the results he achieves are excellent. But if you want the future head of our race to be a Mirabeau, as I do, you will keep him under your own eye and influence. You tell me he is 'all Vassan'; well, if you send him at eight to Choquard's you will make him 'all Choquard.' The idea is preposterous."

But though the Marquis allowed himself to be ruled in this matter by his brother, he by no means abandoned all further thought of the Abbé Choquard. In fact, for the next seven years he kept Choquard's "house of correction," as he termed it, as a sort of rod in pickle with which the unmanageable boy was constantly threatened.

Stimulated afresh by the Bailli's advice to the task of moulding his heir in his own image, the Marquis employed one Fleury as the immediate successor of the too lenient and inefficient Poisson. Fleury had formerly kept a school of arms, and must, therefore, the Marquis thought, be a disciplinarian. He used to come to the Château de Bignon for a couple of hours, morning and afternoon, and endeavour to drill history, geography, and arithmetic into Gabriel, with the assistance of the

impatient father, who remained in the room with a rattan in his hand which he used unsparingly.

At the end of three months Fleury, suspected of attempting to undo the effects of the rattan by lightening the tasks of his pupil, was dismissed.

"I did not engage you," said the Marquis angrily, "to experiment on the boy, but to carry out my ideas."

"Nevertheless, M. le Marquis," the man replied, "your son is not a boy on whom punishment will ever produce the result you aim at. I believe if you treat him kindly you may make anything of him you like."

But though the stern and easily irritated father did not believe in the efficacy of "kindness" as a means of turning a Vassan into a Mirabeau, he nevertheless now determined to give it a trial in order to prove its fallacy to the Duc de Nivernais, who was always advocating it. So he sent Gabriel to the village school at Bignon, which was kept by an amiable old man who did not believe in the birch.

One day, three or four months later, when Mouët's scholars, instigated by the young Comte Gabriel de Mirabeau, locked him into the schoolroom and ran off with the key, the Marquis considered that he had conclusively disproved the arguments in favour of kindness. Gabriel was given a hiding and Father Imbert, one of the King's chaplains, was appointed to act as tutor to him. This man did not err on the side of clemency. He persuaded the Marquis to confide the rattan to him, and to withdraw during the hours devoted to instruction. But under Father Imbert, who to the rod added cuffs, kicks, and a system of espionage by which every act of the boy was reported to his father, Gabriel only became more unmanageable than ever.

"What am I to do with this eldest son of mine?" wailed the Marquis to the Bailli. "I do not believe so serious and well-intentioned a parent as I was ever saddled with so cross-grained, fantastic, incompatible a

lad as Gabriel. His type is inconceivable. With plenty of talent and cleverness, he is a nothing bedizened with crotchets. Because he has an uncommonly retentive memory he talks as if he would swallow the world, but though he may fling dust into the eyes of silly women he will never be the fourth part of a man. He is, too, more vicious than ever; in this respect almost incurably maniac. Don't think that I exaggerate. From the confessor to the playmate all are so many reporters to me. I see the nature of the beast and doubt if I can make anything of him. One quality, however, there is to his credit. He has the family instinct of pride, like a true Mirabeau."

The effect on the Bailli of the frequent receipt of such letters finally induced him to change his opinion as to the advisability of sending his nephew away from home; and the Marquis, with the approval of his brother and at the instigation of Madame de Pailly, who had never ceased her vindictive efforts to separate the boy from his mother, was preparing to put his oft-repeated threat of Choquard into effect, when Gabriel fell dangerously ill.

Brutus, for all his stubborn pride, was not devoid of natural affection; on the contrary, concealed under the brambles of public and private disappointment, there was a deep well of tenderness in him. It was the source of his boasted friendship for humanity, that love of men in the abstract which, like some roaring, unnavigable river rushed through his life. It was the fountain whence he drew his devotion to his mother and brother, whence spurted the generosity that induced him to offer a home to his sister-in-law, the Chevalier's widow. And now when he believed his heir, "almost incurably maniac," to be at the point of death, it swept away the brambles that choked it, and submerged the baffled pride and anger of his intensely obstinate nature.

"My tendon Achilles is in my heart," he said in his odd fashion on the rare occasions he forgot his cue, so

to speak, in his *rôle* of Brutus. "If God had not given me the heart I possess, I should end in a mad-house or make too much noise in the world."

In this frame of mind the Marquis chanced to meet a Major Sigrais, a former comrade in arms. In the old military days the two had been close friends, and the pleasant recollection of their past intimacy prompted the Marquis to renew it at the point where it had been interrupted years before on his retirement from the service. Sigrais himself had recently retired and settled at Versailles. On a visit the Marquis paid him there he made the acquaintance of Madame Sigrais, who was one of the tire-women of the Dauphine, and their lodger, an old Colonel, who had taken up agriculture as a hobby and swore by the Economists.

The unaffected hospitality of the Sigrais, and the profound respect with which he was treated by his self-styled "disciple," caused the Marquis to unburden his heart, which was just then full of his heir, to these worthy people. The Sigrais had a spare room; they begged the Marquis to allow Gabriel, who was convalescing, to come to them for a change of air; and the Marquis, chastened by anxiety, consented.

Gabriel spent a week at Versailles. Such a week! Major Sigrais taught him to ride and fence; the Colonel took him for walks in the fields and lent him his gun to shoot at larks and hares; and Madame Sigrais once smuggled him into the palace, where he caught a glimpse of the Well-beloved and the Pompadour! It was a week of the most unalloyed pleasure he had ever known; he was allowed to do just as he pleased; nobody scolded him.

"Oh, if I could live with you and go to school here, I should be so happy!" he sobbed, when Madame Sigrais kissed him goodbye.

Never before had the boy's better nature been given the chance to manifest itself. As stubborn as his father,

and endowed with a sensibility that no Riqueti had ever possessed, Gabriel had been driven into rebellion in spite of himself. It was the only means he had of defence against the severity and misunderstanding that sought to arrest his soul and imprison it in the narrow cell his father had prepared for it. Kindness, the one thing he craved, the one thing that would have made him enter that cell willingly, had ever been denied him. On the contrary, reproach or contempt were flung him to gnaw, and if he barked at this stony fare there had ever been the lash to silence him. From his uncle, the Bailli, he was sent all the way from Mirabeau on the Durance lectures on duty, and a host of moral maxims to learn by heart. His austere old grandmother, who could never forgive him for resembling the Vassans, treated him with frigid scorn, which hurt him almost as much as the blows and abuse of his father, whom he would have worshipped if Brutus would have suffered him. By tale-bearing tutors and servants he was subjected to the indignity of espionage and the injustice of suspicion. His brothers and sisters took their cue from their elders and twitted him with his pock-marked face. Knowing that he was his father's heir, that some day he would be head of the family, it had seemed to him as if there was a conspiracy to prevent him from succeeding to his patrimony.

His illness had been the natural result of the resistance which a high-strung, emotional temperament instinctively offers to everything that seeks to cramp or crush it. In this struggle, the encouragement he received from his mother served but to make it the more bitter, the more fatal. Till he met the Sigrais she was the only member of his family to manifest the least affection for him. And what an affection was hers! It was that of a lioness for her cubs, that of a Pandour for his sword. He was, in fact, the sword with which the Marquise fought her husband, a sword that in her dexterous hand inflicted a wound that never healed.

But as no affection is without virtue, that which Gabriel received from his mother, mischievous though it was, nevertheless kept the embers of his big, generous heart alive. On such a boy the kindness of the Sigrais produced a wonderful effect. Gabriel returned home at the end of the week cured physically, and apparently morally. The Marquis was impressed with the remarkable change in the boy's behaviour, and knowing Sigrais to be a man of great personal worth and an excellent Latin scholar, he asked him to accept the post of tutor to his son. The idea of supplementing his modest pension in this way appealed to the old soldier, the more especially as both he and his wife had taken a great fancy to Gabriel; and Sigrais swore to succeed where Poisson, Fleury, Mouët, and Father Imbert had failed.

"This is your last chance," said the Marquis threateningly on his son's departure for Versailles; "if you prove incorrigible this time I shall send you without fail to the Abbé Choquard's."

Intoxicated with the taste of happiness and freedom, Gabriel now endeavoured manfully to win his father's approval. His efforts, however, were heavily handicapped by the one flaw in Sigrais' system, who, for the purpose of flattering the Marquis with frequent glimpses of his son's progress, urged on the father the necessity of Gabriel's returning home the end of each week. These weekly departures from Versailles were the cause of great anxiety to the boy, who dreaded lest he should commit some act that would prevent his return. There was something pathetic in the promises he made the Sigrais, to whom he was passionately attached, to avoid giving his father the least cause of offence. But alas! for him, the extraordinary circumspection of his behaviour itself defeated its object. Soured by the waning of his popularity and kept in a ferment of irritability by his wife, the Marquis could not understand how a boy who had been, as he considered, so wilful and vicious should

all of a sudden become a model of deportment. He regarded Gabriel's efforts to please him, to avoid the mischief to which he had been so prone, to keep aloof from the wrangling and quarrelling that never ceased in the house, as evidences of the cunning of a depraved nature. Sigrais' weekly reports still further increased his suspicions.

"The man extols the boy's goodness of heart," he complained to Madame de Pailly, who was becoming more and more an influence in his life, "as if I, who have had far greater experience of my son, didn't know that it is nothing more than common politeness to anyone who notices him. Then, again, Sigrais is always vaunting Gabriel's mental capacity as something phenomenal, when I, his father, know that his accomplishments have no sounder basis than a parrot's!"

"It is easy to see that Sigrais has a kindly, romantic nature, and that Gabriel knows how to impose on it," replied Madame de Pailly, whose interest it was to foster the Marquis' misgivings.

"Well, I must keep my eye on Sigrais," he sighed; "he is an honest fellow, but I can't allow him to spoil the boy."

As nothing that Gabriel did seemed to give satisfaction, the anxiety occasioned him by his weekly visits to his father fostered a conviction that one day his little card-castle of happiness would tumble suddenly. He confided his presentiment to Madame Sigrais; she pretended to make light of it, but he overheard her afterwards saying to her husband:

"Mark my words, it is that Madame de Pailly who sets the Marquis against the child."

"What," he thought, as he struggled against the fear that choked him, "are all my efforts to please my father to be foiled by this woman? Who is she, and what right has she to interfere in my life and spoil it?"

He remembered a man, a soldier on crutches, that he

had once heard cursing the Pompadour as a harlot who had bewitched a tyrant—a harlot who ought to be strangled. The hatred that had shot from the beggar's eyes had fallen like a live spark on some combustible emotion in the boy's soul and exploded it. He had known for a moment what it was to hate, and he experienced the same feeling now.

"I hate you!" he muttered, clenching his fists and staring with fixed eyes on the imaginary figure of Madame de Pailly, which passion made real; "I hate you! I hate you! If you injure me I will strangle you!"

CHAPTER IV

THE HOME INFLUENCE

THE Marquise de Mirabeau had been quick to attempt to turn her husband's questionable friendship for Madame de Pailly to her own advantage. By feigning a jealousy she did not feel she sought to obtain the whip-hand over the Marquis, and by giving publicity to wrongs from which she did not really suffer she hoped to injure his mistress. Not to have succeeded in such an undertaking would have been impossible, considering the brazen effrontery of the Marquise; but the benefit that she derived in return was very doubtful. The Marquis, though taunted to distraction, was not to be humiliated; while Madame de Pailly, shorn of reputation and social position, became a more dangerous and inveterate foe than ever.

The patience and prudence with which she waited for her revenge made the Marquise regard her hostility with contempt. In the seven years that had elapsed since her attempt to separate Gabriel from his mother, Madame de Pailly had not once scored a victory over her enemy; she had, on the contrary, lost everything she had gained in society. But when, owing to the ill-repute into which her name had fallen, even the Comtesse de Rochefort broke with her—a humiliation that she suffered about the time that Gabriel was sent to the Sigrais—Madame de Pailly resolved to wait no longer for the chance of a revenge that never came, but to create it herself.

The loss of the Comtesse de Rochefort's friendship frightened her ; influenced by the defection of a woman for whom he had such a high esteem, might not the Marquis, too, desert her ? To secure her man of genius, the last asset of her ambition, beyond the possibility of loss, Madame de Pailly resolved to risk a battle with the Marquise de Mirabeau that should result in a complete and lasting victory for one or the other. But before taking the offensive she carefully studied the ground on which this decisive engagement was to be fought. The Marquise, entrenched, so to speak, behind nineteen years of marriage, seemed impregnable. This redoubtable position was, however, weakened by sedition within. The Marquise Dowager was ready at any cost to her pride and her principles to be rid of her daughter-in-law, while the Bailli believed that his brother's happiness could never be secured as long as his wife continued to live with him. Having made sure of this powerful support, Madame de Pailly hoped to persuade the Marquis, under the artful pretext of recovering some of the respectability his friendship had cost her, to invite her to visit his family at Bignon, and thus take her enemy by surprise and the position by storm.

"Surely," she thought, "the Marquise will refuse to remain under the same roof with me."

The success of this manœuvre would, she knew, depend entirely on her power over the Marquis. How real was it ? Would it stand the test to which it would be put by the *dénouement* that would result in her coming to Bignon ? But was not this *dénouement* the end to which his whole married life had tended since she first crossed his path ? Had she not, by sitting for seven years at the feet of his vanity in a posture of ardent admiration, accustomed him to turn to her for inspiration and sympathy ?

"Yes, my power over him is real enough," she told herself. "I can make him do anything I suggest. He is

to me like a book that I have conned by heart, such a book as one loves; every page is underlined, annotated, thumbed, dog-eared!"

As there never has lived a distracted philosopher proof against the sympathy of a beautiful and clever woman, Madame de Pailly was not mistaken.

The Marquis de Mirabeau did not in the least fear scandal. On the lofty peak of Riqueti pride on which he lived he was far above its miasma; it is true, circumstances frequently compelled him to descend from that Olympian height and breathe less rarefied air, even to dwell for a time in the deadly swamp of ridicule, but he did so with a sense of his immunity from infection. It was not in the power of fear to humble the pride of a Mirabeau.

The Marquis knew quite well that by inviting Madame de Pailly to Bignon he would force his wife to leave him; and having made up his mind that a separation would be to his advantage, he was not the man to pay the slightest attention to what the world might say. His pride, however, refused to allow him to regard the rupture he contemplated as a "separation." The idea conveyed by this term hurt his dignity; it implied the failure of his attempt to be absolute lord of his own house and family. So Brutus resolved that the departure of his wife from Bignon should resemble banishment. And to render the effect he wished to create the more impressive, he gathered his family around him to witness the disgrace of the Marquise.

There were present the Marquise Dowager, cold and austere; the widow of the melodramatic Chevalier, timid and shadowy; the Marquis' second daughter, Caroline, a matron of sixteen, tall, beautiful, and placid; M. du Saillant, her young husband, to whom she had not yet been married a year, dutiful and dull; Boniface, a handsome boy of ten, "all Mirabeau"; and Gabriel, now

fifteen, "all Vassan," short, thick-set and ungainly, dark, shock-headed and pock-marked—an ugly boy with a pair of magnificent eyes. Glancing around the room, the Marquis beheld his entire family, with the exception of his brother, the Bailli, and his eldest and youngest daughters, Marianne and Louise, both of whom were at Montargis.

"I have summoned you here," said Brutus, fixing his eyes on his wife and speaking with an air of judicial solemnity, "to inform you that I have invited Madame de Pailly to pay us a visit at Bignon. She will arrive next week after our own return, and I hope she will receive a cordial welcome from all."

Something in his tone, in the presence of the assembled family, convinced the Marquise that a snare had been set for her. Something also told her that there was no escaping it. In the first flush of surprise she was speechless.

A similar effect was produced on all the others, save the Marquise Dowager, who was in the secret. Each one guessed that a battle of more than ordinary violence was impending, a battle into which all would be drawn, and compelled willy-nilly to choose sides. And each silently and nervously awaited the first shock.

To none was the situation more acutely painful than to Gabriel. He had been the last to enter the room, and at the sight of the assembled family he was convinced, even before his father had begun to speak, that the presentiment he always had on leaving Versailles each week was about to be realised. Something was about to happen that would prevent him from ever going back to the Sigrais. He sat in his chair rigid with suspense, and looked despairingly from his father to his mother.

The Marquise Dowager was the first to break the pause that followed the Marquis' words, a pause of scarcely a moment's duration, but which to those

summoned against their will to take part in the conflict appeared endless.

"Come here, Boniface," she said in her frozen voice, taking a pinch of snuff and shutting her box with a click.

The boy, whose obedience, if not affection, she had exacted from infancy by the openly avowed intention of making him her heir at the expense of his elder brother, immediately crossed the room to her side. At this movement, which had all the appearance of desertion, the Marquise burst into a mocking laugh. It seemed to convulse her.

"I fail to see any cause for laughter in the fact that Madame de Pailly will pay us a visit next week when we return to Bignon," said the Marquis icily.

"Oh, but if you could only see yourself as you really are!" she shrieked. "A Louis Quinze pretending to be the Friend of Men! Oh, là, là! A Brutus who would not sue for the favour of Madame de Pompadour tied to the skirts of a harlot! Oh, là, là, là! But," she added, and her laughter suddenly ceased, "suppose I refuse to play the obedient, humiliated Marie Leczinska to your Louis Quinze; suppose I utterly refuse to receive your Pompadour?"

She seemed to play with her words, like a duellist with a rapier seeking the moment to lunge.

"In that case," said the Marquis, who still retained his composure, "as I have guaranteed Madame de Pailly a cordial welcome, I suppose you will return to your mother's house, as you have threatened to do for nineteen years."

"Oh, as to leaving you, that I am quite ready to do," retorted the Marquise, feigning to retreat in order to invite an attack; "but I have no intention of being tricked into making room for your mistress. When I go it shall be on my own terms."

The Marquis merely bowed. The preservation of his self-command, which in all previous battles with his wife

he had lost in the first onset, flattered him with the idea that he had quite caught the true Brutus air.

Perceiving that by the admission of her willingness to leave her husband she was being driven into an ambush, the Marquise now endeavoured to avoid the humiliation of an unconditional surrender. Her line of retreat, though threatened, was not yet cut off, and she proceeded to retire under cover of a fierce rearguard action. Unskilled in the art of subtlety, she was not, however, without a certain cunning. To feign jealousy now was out of the question, but the pose of the martyred mother might avail her, and bursting into tears, she endeavoured to play upon the feelings of her children.

"You have heard the shameful insult I have received from your father," she cried, addressing them dramatically. "I am to be driven from the house that a prostitute may be installed in my place! As your mother, I appeal to you against this creature, this adventuress who is the talk of Paris, whom your father would give you as a stepmother. I cannot believe that you will tamely submit to have such a woman set in authority over you, while the mother who bore you is held up to public ignominy. I have not been a good mother to you, but I beg you to forgive me and to defend me now as well as yourselves!"

The placid Madame du Saillant was overcome by this appeal, but not daring to offend her father, of whom she was terribly afraid, and on whom both she and her husband were dependent, she gave her mother no more practical aid than such sympathy as her tears might convey. M. du Saillant endeavoured to appear neutral by busying himself with consoling his wife. Boniface, accustomed to many similar scenes of violence, and too young to appreciate the full meaning of this, remained motionless beside his grandmother, who implanted a chill kiss on his rosy cheeks as a reward for his apparent, if not real, indifference.

Gabriel, on the contrary, was profoundly moved. Every word his mother uttered found an echo in his heart; he half rose from his chair, his feet shuffled on the floor, but the memory of the Sigrais was too much for him. To defend his mother at such a time would cost him his happiness, and he had known so little of it! He gripped the arms of the chair in which he sat, as if to hold himself back by force from plunging over the precipice of temptation on which he found himself.

"What, is there no one to take a mother's part?" cried the Marquise, who had paused for an effect that she had failed to produce. "Are you all silent, even you, Gabriel?"

His hands relaxed their grip of the chair, then tightened again convulsively. The Marquise noticed his struggle and guessed its cause.

"So you think," she said, "to keep your father's favour by sacrificing me to Madame de Pailly. My poor boy!"

The rag of pity she flung him served but to increase the shame of the thought she had stripped naked. With a cry Gabriel leapt to his mother and clasped her in his arms.

The Marquise looked at her husband triumphantly; in her exultation she did not give a thought to the fate of the boy, in whom she saw only an ally whose arrival at such a moment saved her retreat from a rout. Gabriel, on the contrary, conscious that he had sacrificed his happiness to the impulse which urged him to stand by his mother, experienced an emotion that seemed to give to his dead hopes a funeral pyre worthy of them. He waited in a state of exaltation for his father's wrath to smite him.

The assembled family looked at the Marquis with bated breath, expecting him in a fit of white-hot passion to strike down both his wife and son. The Marquise, indeed, invited him to strike her. It would be less humiliating, she thought, to let the world believe that

she had left her husband because of his brutality than because she had been driven away by the intrigues of Madame de Pailly.

"I am not afraid of you!" she shrieked tantalisingly, as he stalked up to her. "Strike me, if you dare!"

"Victor!" interposed the Marquise Dowager warningly.

But the Marquis did not need this caution to remind him of Brutus; he intended to preserve his dignity in this situation at all costs.

"Madame," he said bitingly, and apparently oblivious of his son, "as I do not wish to die of the colic you have given me for nineteen years, I intend to cure it by means of a remedy that I believe to be infallible. Perhaps you will give me your attention while I arrange for your future residence."

The utter indifference he manifested of the boy at her side emphasised the suggestion in his words of a force held in reserve.

"That is my affair, not yours," she retorted, endeavouring to conceal her uneasiness with a derisive laugh. "I will leave you at once, this very day, but I shall go where I please."

"You forget," he rejoined, with provoking coolness, "that as you are my wife the law gives me control of your movements."

"I shall go to Limousin, to my mother," she persisted stubbornly.

"To the province of Limousin, certainly," he corrected, "but not to your mother."

The courage of the Marquise began to falter. Could it be possible that her retreat was cut off after all?

"Not to my mother?" she echoed; then, as if she hoped to escape by making a frantic dash for liberty, she added fiercely, "You dare not prevent me from going to her. I defy you to prevent me! You seem to forget that it is chiefly to my mother that you owe the money on which you live and educate your children.

Fortunately, she still lives to protect me, and she is not to be trifled with, as you shall learn to your cost!"

"Had I the power over the Marquise de Vassan, madame, that I have over you," said the Marquis, with a feline smile, behind which, so to speak, his words crouched as if making ready to spring, "I should not dream of separating you. On the contrary, I would confine you both in the convent at Limoges."

The Marquise staggered backwards as if she had been struck.

"So you would confine me in the convent at Limoges?" she gasped, choked with surprise that all but deprived her of speech.

"Such is my fixed intention," was the stern reply, and his words now sprang from his lips and seized her in their claws. "M. de Malesherbes, the Keeper of the Seals, has been kind enough to furnish me with a *lettre de cachet* in blank. If you influence your mother to stop her allowance to my family, I shall make use of this *lettre de cachet*, and the good nuns at Limoges shall be instructed to treat you as a prisoner instead of a mere *pensionnaire*. You have but to choose, madame, and I shall oblige you." And he drew from his pocket one of those arbitrary orders of arrest that he had so often denounced as the most inhuman of all the weapons of despotism, and of which he was as often to avail himself in the future without the least self-reproach and with an utter indifference to the gibes of the world.

At the sight of the terrible document the Marquise uttered a cry of despair, which pierced the boy at her side to the heart. With a courage inspired by his exalted sense of self-sacrifice, he flung himself on his knees at his father's feet and implored him to have pity. To Brutus it was a moment of stern joy.

"Choose!" he said inflexibly, addressing his wife and continuing to ignore his son. "Will you go to the convent at Limoges willingly or unwillingly?"

"Willingly, and at once," answered the termagant, with an effort to appear undaunted by her defeat. "But you shall live to regret this hour! There," and she pointed with a melodramatic gesture to the boy who, spurned aside by his father's foot, still knelt on the floor with his head bent on his breast in an attitude of despair. "There is one who will revenge me. I wish you joy of your heir, M. le Marquis de Mirabeau, Friend of Men!" And casting a look of contempt upon the silent witnesses of her crushing defeat, she strode out of the room haughtily.

Thus parted this couple, after wrangling together for nineteen years; but the separation which the Marquis fancied he had effected was but the beginning of an equally long and still more exasperating union. For the war which now ensued, and of which the humiliating departure of the Marquise from her husband's roof was the first battle, tied them the tighter to the unhappiness from which they sought to escape. Apart they were destined to exert an even more fatal influence on their children than when one roof hid the scandal of their lives from the public view.

Though the Marquis had affected to ignore his son, he had by no means forgotten him. The door had no sooner closed on the Marquise than he let Gabriel feel the full weight of his displeasure. Under ordinary circumstances he would probably have given the boy a beating and confined him on bread and water for a week or more, but the satisfaction he experienced from the manner he had adopted in humiliating his wife urged him to employ the same tactics in chastising his son. He was too proud of his success as Brutus to spoil the "curtain" by allowing his anger to get the better of his self-command.

"So," he said between his teeth, looking down at the boy who still knelt at his feet waiting, now no longer transfigured with exaltation, but in sullen despair, for the punishment that was to cost him the little happiness he

had ever known, "so Sigrais has failed, like all the others who have tried to curb your stubborn, perverse character. To-morrow, instead of going back to Versailles, you shall go with me to the Abbé Choquard's house of correction, where, had I followed my own counsel, you should have been placed these seven years. But, that you may realise to the full how base and vicious you are, I intend to take your name from you. I do not wish a name shining with such lustre as that of Mirabeau to be bandied about a house of correction!" And Brutus looked at his mother for approval.

"You are right," she said, casting a malicious glance at her grandson, who seemed stunned by his punishment. "It is better to take his name from him before he sells it. Would to God that Boniface had been your eldest son!" And once more she caressed the cheek of the boy at her side.

But the Marquis, having deprived Gabriel of his name, was suddenly confronted with a difficulty which he had not foreseen in the excitement of passing a sentence that, in his opinion and in that of his family, was the most terrible humiliation that could be inflicted on a Mirabeau. His pride of race revolted at the idea of numbering his son like a galley-slave, or of giving him even a *bourgeois* name. That would be to disgrace not only the boy but the family, of which he was, after all, the heir. Nevertheless Gabriel must be known by some appellation, and the manner in which the Marquis evaded his difficulty was very characteristic.

"As you are a Vassan," he said scornfully, "in looks as well as character, one of the titles of that cursed family is best suited to you." And he solemnly bestowed on the wretched boy the name of Pierre-Buffière, which was that of the premier barony of Limousin, an estate belonging to Madame de Vassan that on her death the Marquis hoped to inherit as part of his wife's *dot*.

At the sound of this strange name Gabriel recovered

his wits. He did not fear the Abbé Choquard or his house of correction—they would at least save him from the hell of continuing to live on in such a home as his. But to lose his name, a name all the pride of which he had inherited, which was a part of himself, was an overwhelming punishment. Clasping his father by the knees, he pleaded passionately that such a stigma as Pierre-Buffière should be removed from him.

"To err and to forgive, papa," he reasoned, "is the way of God towards man and man towards God."

"Yes," said the implacable Marquis, "but between man and man the distance is too great for it to be thus. There are dregs in every race, and you are the dregs of the Riquetis."

And he turned to the Marquise Dowager, offering her his arm in his usual courtly way to conduct her from the room.

"Oh, mamma, mamma!" cried the boy, bending his head to the floor on which he knelt. The emotion that had seemed to compensate him for the loss of his happiness had vanished; he had now learnt the cost of the sacrifice.

"That reminds me," said the Marquis sternly, pausing in his passage from the room; "I absolutely forbid any communication of any sort henceforth between you and your mother. If I catch you deceiving me in this respect, M. de Pierre-Buffière, I will brand you with a hot iron, of which you shall bear the mark for the rest of your life!"

The Marquis passed on solemnly and proudly with his mother on his arm, while his family, only too eager to leave the field of battle, followed in his wake submissively, duly impressed. Never before, he was thinking, had the *rôle* of Brutus been played so worthily.

"Pierre-Buffière! Oh, là, là!" jeered Boniface, as he passed the figure of his brother huddled on the floor.

"*De* Pierre-Buffière, Boniface," corrected his grand-

mother, who could not restrain the taunt from passing her thin lips.

And so they passed out and left him there alone in his misery.

The widow of the Chevalier, the uncle to whom Gabriel was said to bear a close resemblance, and the story of whose life had stirred the boy's imagination, was the last to leave the room. Glancing furtively towards the door through which the others had passed, as if to make sure she was not observed, the colourless woman, whose presence in that distracted family was as impalpable as a shadow, bent over him hurriedly and touched him with her hand.

"I am sorry for you, Gabriel," she murmured.

He raised his face, disfigured with tears and pock-marks, but she had vanished.

CHAPTER V

THE HOUSE OF CORRECTION

THE shine of not a few brilliant and exceptional intellects has cast the real poverty of the educational system of the eighteenth century into a shadow so thick as almost entirely to conceal it from notice. Dazzled by the glitter of the *salons*, one is apt to take it for granted that the road to learning, if not so well paved as in the present day, was at all events a commodious thoroughfare. As a matter of fact it was little more than a lane, along which the *noblesse* of the sword had disdained to travel until they found that their rivals, the *noblesse* of the robe, by making use of it as a short cut, so to speak, to the highest positions in the State, arrived there ahead of them.

In the olden time it had mattered little to a peer of France whether he was learned or not ; he was satisfied if he could read, write, and count. Later, in the classic age of Louis XIV., culture had been a pose, a fashion ; in the reign of his successor, when with the rapid development of thought the pen for the first time competed successfully with the sword for power, an education *began* to be a necessity. When Dauphins and benevolent despots became philosophers, and the commercial classes Greek and Latin scholars, the aristocracy felt obliged to drift with the current. But even those who were most eager to accept the new conditions, to echo the universal cry for learning, were seriously handicapped by

antiquated customs to which Privilege still clung. Even as late as 1789, when the victory of the Third Estate over the Nobility in the States General proclaimed the final triumph of the pen over the sword, the average noble was the intellectual inferior of the *bourgeois*. This was one of the causes of the degradation of rank in the Revolution.

One of those customs which embarrassed the education of a noble was that which destined him by reason of his rank to the profession of arms. Custom and frequent wars had made military service almost obligatory, and there was scarcely a noble in France, save those who entered the service of the Church, that had not followed for a longer or shorter period of his life this aristocratic career. As seventeen was generally the age at which he received his commission, such education as he possessed had either to be acquired beforehand or continued with the greatest difficulty afterwards. The Marquis de Mirabeau was a rare instance of the latter case; the majority relinquished their studies after entering the army or navy.

To effect a change in this system, which with every decade of the eighteenth century visibly decreased the prestige of the *noblesse*, whose courtly manners now exposed their astonishing ignorance to open contempt, schools, out of which the modern Lycée has developed, were opened by enterprising priests for the benefit of the First Estate. The best known, if not the first, of these institutions was the Abbé Choquard's. He would have been anything but flattered had he known that the Marquis de Mirabeau termed his "Military Academy for the Sons of Noblemen" a "house of correction." Some idea of the advantages he offered may be gathered from his prospectus. In it he informed the noble patronage he solicited that his Academy for preparing young noblemen for the army was situated in the fashionable Rue St. Dominique, in a commodious building in which every

comfort necessary to rank was provided. As to the education which was the *raison d'être* of the school, particular stress was naturally laid on military science, but the curriculum also included ancient and modern languages, history, mathematics, and the fine arts, while special facilities were offered for acquiring the aristocratic accomplishments of dancing, swimming, riding, fencing, and tennis.

The novelty of such an institution at once attracted attention, and the Abbé Choquard had only to fulfil his promises to be assured of success. When Gabriel entered this military academy it had acquired a European reputation, and among the noble and princely names inscribed on its roll those of several foreigners of rank were to be found.

The Marquis de Mirabeau had long known of this school, and had in his impulsive way jumped to the conclusion that the Abbé was a stern disciplinarian because of the unqualified praise he had heard lavished on him by parents whose sons had passed through his hands. He could not conceive that such successful results could be obtained except by a system of uncompromising severity. But the best of all recommendations in his eyes was the fact that the Abbé Choquard was an Economist, and that one of his masters—one Gebelin—had written a book called the *Monde Primitif* in which all the Marquis' pet theories were upheld.

Immediately after his great success as Brutus he had repaired to his study to write a letter to the Abbé notifying him that a new pupil was about to be placed under his care ; and so great was his impatience that, without waiting for a reply, he presented himself, accompanied by his unhappy son, on the following day at the institution in the Rue St. Dominique. The Abbé received them graciously, but without any allusions to Economy. The Marquis, however, on this occasion was too intent on extracting the thorn that had been in his flesh for fifteen

years to think of a subject that at any other time and in the company of such a man as the Abbé he would at once have discussed.

"I wish," he said, after having given Gabriel the worst possible character, "that this boy should be entered on your books, M. l'Abbé, as Pierre-Buffière, and not as the Comte de Mirabeau."

"Under such circumstances, M. le Marquis," remarked the Abbé, who had listened up to this point without interruption, "as much as I should like to oblige you, I am forced to reject your extremely valuable patronage. You will, I am sure, agree with me that in the interest of my noble patrons, to whom I have given promises I have never broken, I could never take as a pupil a lad who has neither identity nor name. M. Pierre-Buffière has nothing to distinguish it from that of a mere tradesman or lawyer."

The effect of the previous day's experiences on Gabriel had brought him to the first great crisis in his life—perhaps the greatest he was ever to face, for it was the one on which his whole future character depended. Sometimes, and especially in the case of a sensitive temperament, the cost of a noble act may leave the soul bankrupt. In a moment of impulsive enthusiasm one may reach a summit on which it is impossible to keep one's footing, a peak not to be conquered a second time. So it seemed to Gabriel. The loss of his name, of which he was quite as proud as his father, the fate of falling at last into the hands of the Abbé Choquard, of whom he had been taught to fear the worst, had dragged him from the exalted pinnacle of self-sacrifice. The iron had entered his spirit; he could no longer grieve for his mother, who had entangled him in her ruin, or for himself. But though crushed he was not cowed. He no longer cared what befell him, but he was resolved to resist to the uttermost every attempt to take the shape of the mould prepared for him. The "house of correction" should

not correct *him*. He had listened to all that his father had said of him to the Abbé with a sullen indifference that heightened the ugliness of his looks and seemed to justify the black character that had been given him.

But when he heard the Abbé protest against this Pierre-Buffière, this shameful name which seemed as if it were branded on his forehead in letters of fire, something made him glance furtively at the man. Could it be possible that he was pleading his cause, that he was not terrible after all? The Abbé intercepted that glance, and as his eyes rested on Gabriel their expression melted the stricken boy, in spite of himself, to tears.

"Oh," said the Marquis, who was too eager to reply to the Abbé's objection to notice that his son was crying, "I would not have you infer that I am any less insensible of my dignity than you are of that of your school. In depriving my son of the use of his name I have been very careful to give him one that, while humiliating him, can in no sense humiliate me. I am quite aware that whatever I may do to him he is still my son. Pierre-Buffière is the name of the premier barony in Limousin, to which I am heir. Call him Baron de Pierre-Buffière, if you like."

"That quite alters the case," said the Abbé, with a curious twinkle of the eye. "You see, M. le Marquis, in a school like mine, where none of the boys are under the rank of chevalier, and where one is the Prince de Conti, a title is a matter of supreme importance to me. I shall be delighted to receive the Baron de Pierre-Buffière as a pupil."

This answer pleased the Marquis extremely; it gave the school the *cachet* his vanity desired.

"Well," he said in a tone in which the air of a *grand seigneur* to an inferior blended with that of a "master" to his "disciple," "I count upon your reputation, and if you are successful I shall leave him with you till it is time for him to enter the army. I do not wish him

to return to his home every week, as he has been in the habit of doing. I intend that he shall be cut off entirely from his family; on no account is he to be allowed to correspond with any one. I cannot lay too much stress on this point." And the Marquis rose to leave.

"You may trust him to me with perfect confidence, M. le Marquis," smiled the Abbé. "Perhaps I have had boys even more refractory than yours, and I have never yet had one I was ashamed to send into the world. My pupils always regret, too, when the time comes to leave." And again the Abbé looked at Gabriel.

"We shall see," sniffed the Marquis, and noticing that Gabriel was once more dry-eyed and sullen, he turned to him with a scowl and added threateningly, "You had better mend here; if not, I shall send you to the colonies and rid myself altogether of you!"

Thus did Gabriel become a member of the Abbé Choquard's Military Academy for the Sons of Noblemen.

"My boy," said the Abbé when the Marquis had departed, "your happiness now depends on yourself. Your father has given you a very bad character, but I am going to judge you entirely by what you prove yourself to be, not by what you may have been. Every lad who comes to my school starts with a perfectly clean record. He is at once put upon his honour and earnestly urged to conduct himself in a manner worthy of a gentleman. If he is quick and industrious he will not find his tasks heavy; if he is slow of learning every allowance is made for him. We cannot all be as brilliant as M. de Voltaire. It is only if a boy is wilful and lazy that he is treated without indulgence. Lying, tale-bearing, and every species of meanness are severely punished here. This is a school for nobles and gentlemen, not for the *bourgeois*, so I expect honour, chivalry, and true nobility from my boys. Do not be afraid of me. I wish you to look on me and the masters under me as your friends

Trust us and we shall trust and respect you." And he led the wondering boy to a large hall in which the whole school, consisting of about thirty boys, were at work.

On the entry of the Abbé all rose to their feet, and gazed with evident curiosity on the new-comer following in his wake. Gabriel had never been a shy boy, and, perhaps, from first to last bashfulness was the only emotion in the gamut of human experience he was not destined to feel, but now, as he entered the hall behind the Abbé, he longed for the floor beneath him to open and engulf him. The pain of his self-consciousness was exquisite. There came back to him the memory of half-forgotten taunts at his personal appearance, sneers and gibes at his ungainly figure, at his slovenly clothes that somehow he could never keep clean and neat, at his "Vassan" face with its blotches and scars. But most of all was he conscious of an overwhelming shame of the name he bore, and he trembled lest these boys should fasten it to him like a kettle to the tail of a dog and chase him about the school with a "Hi, there, Pierre-Buffière! Hi, hi, there!"

Perhaps the shame that crimsoned his face was understood by the Abbé. Instead of mounting the rostrum alone, as was his custom when he had a new boy to introduce to the school, he took Gabriel with him, and placing his arm round the boy's shoulder, he said, as they stood thus with all eyes riveted upon them:

"Messieurs, I bring you a new comrade, M. le Baron de Pierre-Buffière. I am proud to have him among us, and remembering the *camaraderie* and *esprit de corps* for which this school is proverbial, it is needless for me to assure him that you all join me in welcoming him. Vive le Baron de Pierre-Buffière!"

The *vivats* with which this little address was greeted restored to the boy his self-respect. A boyish love of shouting gave them an unmistakable sincerity. Gabriel's

first impression of the terrible Choquard had melted him to tears, the second made him laugh.

It was, of course, inevitable that the boys should quickly discover Gabriel's real name, and eventually the reasons that forced him to conceal it under the title of the "premier baron of Limousin." But the influence of the Abbé would have been sufficient to prevent it from being treated with ridicule if Gabriel himself had not previously won the goodwill of his companions, as he did almost at once. At first the light in which the Abbé and his school were revealed to him was so transfiguring as to awaken fresh terror in the overstrung, emotional boy. He dreaded lest this new life, in which he had so unexpectedly found happiness far greater than that he had known at the Sigrais', should prove a dream. It did not seem possible that his father could have been so mistaken in the "house of correction." This fear, however, soon wore off, and in the wholesome atmosphere he now breathed the finer side of Gabriel's nature began to develop.

In everything to which he applied his mind his success was extraordinary; the rapidity and ease with which he learnt had never before been witnessed in the school. Nor was his capacity for retaining the knowledge he acquired and applying it aptly—in which latter respect he was to be pre-eminent among men—less brilliant. Even the Marquis, who was inclined to give his son credit for very little intelligence, had been struck by the retentiveness of his memory. Like the invigorating tonic it was, this new life gave both body and spirit alike a ravenous appetite. His brain especially never seemed to be able to get enough to eat; it devoured to the last crumb, so to speak, the Choquard curriculum. Nothing came amiss to the precocious boy; he had no more difficulty in digesting dead and modern tongues than a differential and integral calculus. With a liking for such solid meats, he also had a taste for the sweets in the

Abbé's educational bill of fare, and there was no boy in the school who could sit a horse, handle a rapier, or trip a measure like the Baron de Pierre-Buffière.

That Gabriel should have been conscious of his mental superiority was natural, that he should have been proud or conceited about it would have been excusable. It is true that he took the greatest satisfaction in being the king of his company, and it gave him infinite pleasure to assert his royalty. One day the Prince de Conti, whom he had chosen to be his fag because he was a prince of the blood, rebelled.

"What would you do if I were to box your ears?" said the royal boy in a rage. "I will have you remember that if I am your fag I am also the Prince de Conti."

"Asking me as your Royal Highness," said Gabriel, "the question would have puzzled me before the invention of double-barrelled pistols. Asking me as my fag, I would do this." And the foot that was one day to stand on the neck of the monarchy struck the rump of the princelet with such force as to send the royal possessor flying from the room.

But it was not by bullying or boasting that he had won his kingdom. His power, no doubt, was due to the respect for his attainments, which were so universal and superior to those of all the other boys in the school. But his popularity was due to an insinuating frankness that appealed strongly to the imagination. He had a way of slipping into one's heart before one knew he was there. It was the supreme trait of his character, a trait that now manifested itself for the first time, and, like some magical attribute, was to discomfit his enemies as well as to ravish his friends. And the fascination of his personality was still further heightened by his strange ugliness, a monstrous ugliness that one could never forget, and to which his wonderful eyes and his wonderful voice lent all the charm of beauty.

CHAPTER VI

THE KING OF THE SCHOOL

TOWARDS the end of his third year the Abbé informed the Baron de Pierre-Buffière that in all probability he would shortly receive a commission in the army. The boy heard this news with mingled feelings of pleasure and regret. There was no career that he desired more than a military one; to his excitable and romantic imagination the profession of arms suggested adventure, danger, glory. Riqueti, he burned for a life of action. But the thought of leaving the school in which he had experienced more happiness than he had ever dreamt of dashed the joy that he would otherwise have felt. Since the day he had left his father's house he had never returned, never seen or heard from a single member of his family, and this complete isolation, far from softening the bitterness of the past, had, if possible, made it appear more bitter than it was by its contrast with the present. So devoted was he to the Abbé that had he been asked to decide whether he preferred the term, with the opportunities it afforded his vanity of outshining his comrades and receiving their homage, or the holidays, when he had only the Abbé for companion, he would have been at a loss how to reply.

But though Gabriel received no news concerning the family from which he had been ostracised, his father had been kept informed of his existence. Every month the Abbé sent the Marquis a report of his son's progress.

"I do not care so much about what he knows," the Marquis would write to the Abbé, "as about what he does. Has he learnt to obey?"

"Won't you come and judge for yourself, M. le Marquis?" the Abbé had replied over and over again. "I think you would be surprised if you could see the improvement in the Baron de Pierre-Buffière. I have quite reclaimed him."

But the implacable father, influenced by the Egeria whose policy it was to alienate her man of genius from all his children in order that she might maintain unchallenged the position she had with such difficulty acquired in his house, obstinately refused to look upon the son whom he had deplumed of his fine name. Nevertheless, though he would not go himself to the "house of correction," he sent Grévin, his factotum, to report to him on the Abbé's miracle. This man, who served the Marquis in the interest of Madame de Pailly (to whom he owed his post), was a contemptible creature against whom even the Bailli had warned his brother in vain. His mean appearance, which was a faithful index to his sneaking character, had excited Gabriel's antipathy from the moment he beheld him. When the boy discovered who he was his antipathy blazed into hatred, and he hated the fellow for his devotion to Madame de Pailly, for his influence over the Marquis—both of which Gabriel instinctively divined—for his espionage, and above all for the sickening dread he inspired, a dread that degraded the majesty of the king of the school, blighted his pride in his kingship, withered his happiness.

Grévin used to visit the military academy in the Rue St. Dominique regularly on the King's Birthday and the Feast of St. Louis, the two great field-days of the school, when the Abbé invited the parents and friends of his pupils to witness the distribution of prizes. For days after the spy's appearance Gabriel would be a prey to

nervous depression, in which state he imagined that every sudden sound he heard indicated the arrival of Grévin to take him away. In time, however, as nothing happened, he overcame this dread to a certain extent and forced himself to appear to the best advantage before the man. Never, he felt, had he succeeded so well as on the occasion of a certain Feast of St. Louis that occurred shortly after the Abbé had informed him that his school days were drawing to a close.

The programme had commenced with an exhibition of military drill in the garden behind the school, where the young nobles in blue and gold uniforms, under the command of the Baron de Pierre-Buffière, had performed with great *éclat* the new exercise that was about to be adopted by the French army. Later, on the stage which had been erected in the hall, the Baron de Pierre-Buffière had achieved a great success as Orosmane in Voltaire's tragedy *Zaïre*. Again, in the exhibitions of dancing, singing, and fencing which followed—especially in singing—he had won more laurels; while in declamation he fairly carried his audience away with a eulogy of the Great Condé, which he had composed himself and delivered in the most impressive manner.

"Who is this Baron de Pierre-Buffière?" was heard on all sides.

It was a deservedly proud day for the king of the school, and he was in a state of great exhilaration as he sat in a bower at the bottom of the garden with his favourite and watched the display of fireworks with which the *fête* concluded. That the king of a school should have his favourite is as natural as for any other king; when a king has subjects who for a smile or a squeeze of the hand are willing to turn themselves into carpets under his feet, there is always sure to be one to attract more favour than the others. Gilbert Elliot, the happy Pythias to Damon Pierre-Buffière, was the eldest son of a Scotch baronet, who had been sent with his younger brother to Paris

under the care of the well-known philosopher David Hume, to study French at the Abbé Choquard's famous school.

"Messieurs," said the Abbé, when introducing the young foreigners to their comrades in a little speech very characteristic of the principles which he endeavoured to instil into the hearts of his pupils, "you are all here to be educated for the honourable profession of arms. Most of your campaigns will probably be against England, for France and England are like Rome and Carthage, whose rivalry rather than animosity never permitted them to enjoy a long peace. The fortune of war may make you prisoners of war to these young English gentlemen, in which case it would be a happiness to them to meet a private friend in a public enemy. I could tell you many instances of persons whose lives have been saved by such fortunate events. Therefore it becomes you not only from prudence, but from the generosity for which the French are so renowned, to give the best treatment to these strangers, whose friendship may in this way be made to endure and be serviceable to you through life."

The good Abbé's words had been greeted with cries of "*Vive les Anglais!*" and from the seed thus sown had sprung a warm and close friendship between Gabriel and Gilbert Elliot, a friendship that an absence of many years failed to kill, and which proved of the greatest value to the former in the distant future when his fortune was at its lowest ebb.

"The Abbé is going to have my Condé mentioned in the papers to-morrow," he said, as they watched the fireworks together. "The audience liked the parallel I drew between him and Scipio Africanus. I thought their plaudits would never cease."

"You certainly excelled yourself," replied Gilbert; "I never knew you put such fire into your voice. I was thrilled like the rest."

"I was thinking all the time of the effect I would produce on Grévin. I wanted, if possible, to carry him away so that when he went back to my father he would speak in my favour. God! To think that I, with the blood I am come of, should be obliged to seek to soften the heart of that lacquey!"

"Don't think of him," said Gilbert soothingly. "In a short time now you will be gazetted to your regiment, then you will be a man and free. Grévin can do you no harm."

"Yes, I shall be a man when I leave here, and I suppose that means independence. I hope manhood will bring me happiness; that is all I ask of it."

"And I hope it will bring me fame, power, glory, triumph. I would give anything to be applauded as you were to-day. I mean to raise my name higher than it has ever yet been raised by my ancestors. I mean men to talk of me, to honour me, as if I were a sort of king!" And the future Earl of Minto and Viceroy of India sighed as one sighs in a dream.

"That is all very well," returned Gabriel sympathetically. "But guarantee me happiness and I would do without the fame. For happiness I would sell my soul."

"But you have been happy here," said Gilbert. "I have heard you say over and over again that you had never been so happy in your life as here."

"That is true. But over it all has been a shadow, the shadow of the dread of losing it. Yes, the three years I have been here have been happy, terribly happy. All during my childhood my father used to try to frighten me with the threat of sending me to this school, as a priest tries to frighten a sinner with hell. I have lived in terror lest my father should find out that he had sent me to paradise by mistake!"

"All your hells will turn into paradises, Gabriel," said Gilbert affectionately. "You have a wonderful way with you that no one can resist."

"Suppose my father should send me to Guiana, as he once threatened, the colony they call the 'White Man's Grave'? He is capable of it, Gilbert."

"They would make you their king out there."

With an impulsive gesture Gabriel raised Elliot's hand to his lips.

"Yes, I was born to be a king," he exclaimed ecstatically; "I feel I should do justice to the *rôle*. But my kingdom must be a kingdom of love. The reason why I have been so happy here is because I have been loved. Without love I am starved, blighted, *flambé*. I had so little love till I came here. Oh, how I longed for it! To love and be loved, that is what I wish for, not for power or glory. Something tells me I shall get my wish. I often fancy that *she* whom I am seeking is dreaming of me, and that some day I shall wake her from her dream. I shall come like a conqueror and at the noise of my coming she will awake. To love, Gilbert, that's the thing! To feel one's soul sucked out in a kiss!" And he threw his arms passionately round his friend.

"You are mad to talk like this," said Elliot, freeing himself gently from that stifling embrace.

"No, I am not mad, but a Riqueti. Do you remember the story I told you of my uncle, the Chevalier de Mirabeau? In my loveless, lonely childhood I made a hero of him, because my father used to say, when he was angry with me, that I looked like him. Well, I mean to be such another. He knew what love was, and that is what I want. To love as they loved in antiquity, without restraint!"

"Such love would be terrible," said Gilbert.

"Is it more terrible than the fame you seek? That is terrible, I can tell you. But terrible or not, I mean to have it, and when the cup is at my lips I shall not sip it, but gulp it down in one breathless draught, dregs and all!"

"I will make a compact with you, Gabriel. When you

have got your love and I my glory we will compare notes."

A shadow passed over Gabriel's face. He looked at Elliot steadfastly and said sadly: "Perhaps you will forget me when you are famous."

Elliot laughed and disdained to reply.

"I loved you from the moment I saw you, Gilbert," said Gabriel. "That is my way. It would hurt me to be deceived by one I loved. The thought frightens me like —like Grévin."

"What, still thinking of that brute?"

"You will be true to me, Gilbert? Think what it means to me." His earnestness was very impressive.

"How can you doubt me?" said the other reproachfully.

"Forgive me, but I am so excited. All the applause I received to-day has gone to my head and turned it."

A bell rang, summoning the school to evening prayers. Arm in arm the two friends entered the building; at the door a servant stopped them and hurriedly pressed a letter into Gabriel's hand. He opened it tremblingly and devoured its contents at a glance. It was from his maternal grandmother, the Marquise de Vassan.

"A report has reached your father," it ran, "that your mother has had a *liaison* with an officer in the garrison at Limoges. Straightway he procured a *lettre de cachet*, and at the present moment she is kept in the strictest confinement at the convent where she has been living for the last three years. I have not been allowed to see her or communicate with her, and I have come to Paris to use my influence at Court to free her. I shall need your help. Will you come to me, even if you have to break the rules of your school to do so? You can trust the man who gives you this letter. I have paid him well."

The receipt of such a letter, the first direct communication he had received from any of his relations since his

arrival at Choquard's, agitated Gabriel profoundly. Under the stimulating influences to which he had been exposed during the last three years the quick, chivalrous impulses of his temperament had acquired a fresh intensity. His first thought on reading the letter was of his mother. She was in trouble and needed him; to shut his ears to her cry was impossible. Without a word he put the letter into Gilbert's hand.

"Oh, but you must not go," said Elliot; "think of the risk."

"I could manage it without detection."

"But you would have to deceive the Abbé; think how he trusts you!"

In the conflict of chivalrous impulses that Gilbert's words provoked, Gabriel's desire to help his mother yielded reluctantly to a dread of taking a mean advantage of the Abbé's faith in him.

"You are right. I could not do that," he sighed, and trembling with emotion he passed on.

"But monsieur will give me an answer for Madame de Vassan?" whispered the servant. "I have been paid to take it, I am to be trusted."

"No, don't send an answer," pleaded Gilbert. "It may be a trap. Remember, Grévin was here to-day."

There was a sort of malignity about the receipt of this disturbing letter that filled Gabriel with resentment the more he thought of it. Following so suddenly and mysteriously upon the brilliant success he had scored that day, all the circumstances connected with the situation seemed to the proud-spirited boy so many checks to his triumph, so many humiliating reminders of his father's cruel injustice. The very fact of *receiving* the letter, were it known, would be regarded as an act of disobedience and punished accordingly. To be reminded of the spy at such a moment stung him to exasperation.

"I will!" he said fiercely, drawing his arm from Gilbert's; and bidding the servant wait, he lied to the Abbé

in order that he might be excused from prayers and reply to his grandmother's letter.

To escape from the school was, however, impossible, and after two or three letters on the subject had passed between Madame de Vassan and Gabriel, their correspondence ceased. But the episode was not closed, as Gabriel hoped. Foiled in her efforts to obtain her daughter's release, and distracted by the Marquis de Mirabeau's persistent refusal either to see her or to answer her letters, the old fury sent the Marquis her grandson's letters to her as a proof of the boy's fidelity to his mother. The anger of the Marquis on receiving these letters was even greater than Madame de Vassan's in sending them ; for she really had no desire to injure Gabriel, and, delighted at having drawn the Marquis' blood, she was not indisposed to compensate her grandson with a secret and serviceable gift of money. But the anger she succeeded in arousing in the Marquis all but brought Gabriel's career at Choquard's to an inglorious close.

The Marquis at once wrote to the Abbé and denounced him as the accomplice of his son, announcing his intention at the same time of removing the boy within a week. This respite, which was only due to the embarrassment that the Marquis encountered in endeavouring to decide at a moment's notice what to do with his son, was made use of by Gilbert to prove his friendship for Gabriel. He drew up a petition on behalf of his friend, and having got the whole school to sign it, presented it to the Marquis at the head of a deputation of his comrades. The piteous appeal of the petition and the humble bearing of the boys, some of whom bore the noblest names in France, were not without their effect on the Friend of Men. But before giving a decisive reply he consulted Madame de Pailly, as was his habit. As she thoroughly disliked Gabriel, it would have given her no small satisfaction to have induced the Marquis to reject the petition; but perceiving that he was in the mood to grant the petition of the

boys, she urged him to overlook his son's offence. For to encourage his inclinations, and when they conflicted with hers to appear to give way till she could contrive some subtle pitfall in which to snare them, was the secret of her spell.

"It will make you appear magnanimous," she said, "and as your plans for gazetting him are not complete it will give you time to find a regiment with a colonel to suit your requirements."

So the Baron de Pierre-Buffière was permitted to remain three months longer at school, at the end of which period he proceeded to Saintes, where he joined the regiment under the command of the Marquis de Lambert.

But the Friend of Men never forgave the Abbé Choquard.

"He deceived me for three years," he complained bitterly. "He was never really either a disciplinarian or an Economist."

CHAPTER VII

AT SAINTES

THE discontent that the Marquis de Mirabeau had experienced while in the army had by no means prejudiced him against the service ; on the contrary, though he personally preferred a pen to a sword, a philosopher to a general, he had a great respect for the military profession. He remembered that the Riquetis had always been soldiers, and his reverence for the memory of his ancestors was such that at times he even upbraided himself for his lack of martial spirit. To keep up the tradition, therefore, he desired that his sons, like his father's before them, should enter the King's service.

As a noble he had a *right* to demand commissions for them, for under the *ancien régime* the army was the exclusive preserve of the aristocracy, none but nobles having the prerogative of hunting its commissions, promotions, and privileges. Merit, it is true, was loudly acknowledged and magnificently rewarded, but it was always merit wearing the uniform of rank. It was not till the Revolution that it was possible to turn a private soldier into a field-marshal or a corporal into an emperor. Nevertheless, though it was the *right* of a noble to hunt in this preserve, it depended on his credit at Versailles how much of its game he should bag. Thanks to his reputation as the " Friend of Men," the Marquis de Mirabeau had many powerful friends at Court. He could, had he wished, have placed Gabriel in the King's Mousque-

taires, but, like all his family, he made a point of never asking a favour of the Court. He would have scouted the idea that the fifty-four *lettres de cachet* which in the course of his life he obtained from the Keeper of the Seals were granted to him as a *favour;* a noble, in his opinion, had a *right* to a *lettre de cachet.*

Consequently, when it came to procuring a commission in a regiment that should have all the rigour of a *lettre de cachet* and at the same time be worthy of the rank of the culprit of whom he had the misfortune to be the father, the Marquis' vanity encountered a dilemma. For as punitive commissions did not exist in the French army, could he have humbled himself to solicit what he wanted and had the Court been disposed to satisfy him, it would have been necessary to create a regiment especially for him. He found, however, a way out of his difficulty. The Marquis de Lambert, Colonel of the Berri-Cavalerie, disgusted at the utter inefficiency of the average officer on entering the army, had conceived the idea of forming a cadet school in his regiment for the purpose of fitting young nobles for the service. His scheme, thanks to his influence at Court, had received the sanction of the Government, and he had trained quite a number of cadets to receive commissions when a cadetship in the Berri-Cavalerie was recommended to the Marquis de Mirabeau as the solution of his difficulty.

The reputation of the Marquis de Lambert for severity and discipline would have satisfied the sternest parent.

"He is," the Friend of Men was informed, "a man put together as they were in the good old times. He has a chest like an ancient Gaul's, and a voice to match. His motto is 'Honour and Obedience,' and that the Berri-Cavalerie shall live up to it he feeds them on cold, hard fare. As he believes that discipline can best be maintained by fear, he keeps a tight hand on officers and men alike. The restraints to which his cadets are subjected are particularly severe, but beneficial, for he boasts

that more than one father has thanked him for forming his son."

"There is only one drawback," said the Comtesse de Rochefort, of whom, as a near relation of this paragon of a colonel, the Marquis asked for further particulars: "Lambert is but five-and-twenty."

But if the Marquis had any doubts as to the wisdom of placing a high-spirited boy of eighteen in subjection to one so little his senior they were laid at rest on discovering that the Colonel of the Berri-Cavalerie was an enthusiastic Economist.

"Nevertheless," suggested Madame de Pailly in her subtle way, "as you have just had a very disillusioning experience of the trust to be put in the Abbé Choquard, who was also an Economist with a reputation for severity, it seems to me that you could not do better than to send some one to Saintes to keep an eye on the Marquis de Lambert as well as on Gabriel."

Accordingly Grévin was selected for this double purpose under the mask of valet to the Baron de Pierre-Buffière!

Accustomed from his earliest years to regard the army as the career for which he was destined, Gabriel had learnt at the Abbé Choquard's to look forward with pride to the day when he should receive his commission. Nothing, therefore, could have been more mortifying to him than the manner in which he entered the service. But it was not until he arrived at Saintes that he realised to the full the humiliation that his father had prepared for him as the punishment for corresponding with his grandmother. In the solitude of the small, bare room, as forbidding as a cell, which had been assigned to him by the Spartan colonel, his situation was revealed to him stripped of all its illusions. To expect a commission as a matter of course and receive a cadetship! To dream of manhood and independence and awake to an overgrown childhood! The favourite of a Choquard become

the slave of a Lambert! From the kingship of his school how base a fall! The embers of the evil passions that the Abbé Choquard had all but extinguished blazed in him once more. He resolved to rebel, to assert his manhood, to fight for his independence.

He was chewing the bitter cud of disillusion when Grévin chanced to enter the room. The sight of the spy, at once his master and his servant, maddened him. Guided by an ungovernable impulse that, while impelling him, warned him of the danger of obeying it, Gabriel sprang upon the fellow, and pinning him by the throat to the wall, cried:

"You spy, you cur, for three years I have waited for this moment! It is my turn now. You have been sent by the harlot, whose dupe my father is, to shadow me, to report upon my actions. Well, you shall not lack material; here is something on which you may dilate to your heart's content, something that you shall not be able to exaggerate!"

And releasing his grip on the throat of the terrified, half-strangled man, he flogged him with his riding-whip as even he in his childhood had never been flogged.

The screams of Grévin, writhing under the lash in Gabriel's pitiless hand, reached the barrack-yard and the ears of the Colonel of the Berri-Cavalerie, who happened to be crossing it at the time.

"Find out and let me know at once what is the meaning of this unseemly noise," he said sternly to an orderly, as he passed.

"Tell Colonel the Marquis de Lambert," said Gabriel, who, exhausted with passion and fatigue, threw away his whip as the orderly entered the room, "that Cadet the Baron de Pierre-Buffière is merely exercising one of the privileges of his rank and chastising a scoundrel of a servant."

The haughtiness of the message, conveyed word for word to the Colonel, lost none of its impertinence in

transmission. On its receipt the Marquis de Lambert ordered the new cadet to be brought before him.

Though the severity for which he was noted bore a close resemblance to brutality, the Marquis de Lambert was not without a certain rough sense of justice. He had received a warning beforehand what to expect of this cadet, but it had made no impression on him ; he had "formed," as he termed it, too many characters to anticipate a resistance he could not overcome. In summoning Gabriel before him he was not thinking of the flogging of Grévin—he was himself too much of an aristocrat to deny an aristocrat the *right* to flog a servant—but of his own authority. He merely intended to assert it by administering a stern reproof, for not even he expected a cadet who had not been twenty-four hours in the regiment to have learnt its regulations by heart.

"Monsieur," he said coldly when Gabriel stood before him, "the infliction of punishment in this regiment is my prerogative. I permit no one to usurp it."

"Monsieur," was the haughty reply, "it is not for a cadet to remind a colonel that honour no less than obedience has its obligations. I——"

"But," retorted Lambert icily, "it is the duty of a colonel to remind a cadet that his honour no less than his obedience is at the command of his superiors."

Had the Marquis de Mirabeau deliberately sought to ruin his son he could have devised no speedier method than to place, as he had done, this youth of eighteen, who for three years had been accustomed to be treated as the king of his school, under this Colonel of twenty-five, who enforced discipline by fear. Notwithstanding, Gabriel might have managed to avoid falling into the snare which his father's utter inability to judge character or to understand human nature had laid for him. He might, indeed, have won the goodwill of the Colonel of the Berri-Cavalerie as he had won that of Sigrais and Choquard ; dragons more terrible than the Marquis de Lambert were

to be tamed by the witchery of his splendid eyes and seductive voice. But disillusion had deprived him of all desire to please; the sop that might have pacified the Cerberus in the Colonel was turned to gall.

"That, monsieur," he replied offensively, "I will never admit. My father has sent me into the army with neither name nor status. I stand before you a thing, not a man, but debased as I am I still have the sense of honour. It cannot be taken from me; it is my breath, my life. I shall defend it with the last drop of my blood. My honour obeys only the voice of my conscience."

"The fellow adds insolence to insubordination," murmured an *aide-de-camp* who was making a minute of the interview.

To be answered back was a thing that had never before happened to the Marquis de Lambert; nevertheless, conscious of the dignity of his position, which he took very seriously, he had endeavoured to keep his temper. But there was something so studiously offensive in the manner in which Gabriel continued to question his authority that he was now no longer able to contain himself.

"Do you know whom you are addressing?" he shouted.

"Yes," was the fearless answer; "the Marquis de Lambert, Colonel of the Berri-Cavalerie!"

"Well, then, the sooner you learn to respect him the better," thundered the Colonel. "The penalty for insubordination in this regiment is imprisonment. I sentence you to the cells for one month. At the end of this period you will perhaps have learnt that honour and obedience are one and the same in this regiment." And he ordered a sergeant to remove the prisoner.

"It is a declaration of war," said Gabriel, bowing haughtily to the Colonel as he was led away.

The war between the cadet and the Colonel lasted two years, and was not without victories for the former, in spite of the overwhelming forces arrayed against him.

He passed the greater part of the first six months of his service in the Berri-Cavalerie in the regimental prison; scarcely was he released before he sought fresh occasions to exasperate his beardless Colonel. But colonel-baiting at last palled on him, and he grew weary of imprisonment, lightened though it was by the furtive kindness of his warders, whose goodwill he managed to gain. So he lowered his flag, and, having obtained his release, managed to pass his time agreeably enough.

Saintes, where the Berri-Cavalerie was stationed, had formerly been one of the most flourishing cities of Aquitaine; and it reminded one of its decayed grandeur like a person who had seen better days. It possessed an amphitheatre larger than the celebrated one at Nîmes, and a triumphal arch erected by Germanicus in honour of the Emperor Tiberius, both of which recalled its splendour during the Roman occupation. In later times its importance was attested by the numerous battles that had been fought under its walls, in one of which St. Louis had won a signal victory over the English. It also boasted a sack and a bishopric, and disputed with Agen the supreme distinction of having been the birthplace of that wondrous thinker in gold, Bernard Palissy. But apart from its rather splendid past Saintes was an insignificant town, earning a comfortable livelihood by the manufacture of farm implements and brandy, and diverting itself with garrison gossip.

The distractions of such a place were necessarily few and unexciting, but such amusement as was to be found Gabriel made the most of. Taking advantage of the liberty allowed him, he soon made the acquaintance of half the population of the town, by whom his name, his person, his history, and his character were reflected in a rosy light on the other half.

At eighteen popularity is the herald of romance. Saintes was the scene of Gabriel's first *amourette* as it had been of his first disillusion.

"If you wish to have some fun, Pierre-Buffière," said a brother cadet to him one May evening, "come with me at sunrise to the amphitheatre. To-morrow is St. Eustelle's day.

"St. Eustelle's day?" he returned; "what is she the saint of?"

"She is the saint of all girls who wish to be married."

"That is a good sort of a saint," laughed Gabriel. "But what will happen in the amphitheatre?"

"Do you know the fountain in the centre?" said the other. "Well, on that spot, according to tradition, Eustelle, the daughter of a Roman governor of Saintes, was baptized on being converted to Christianity. And afterwards it became the custom, though when or how or why nobody knows, for all girls wishing husbands to assemble in the amphitheatre at sunrise on St. Eustelle's day and drop two thorns into the fountain. If the thorns fall to the bottom crosswise, she to whom they belong will be married within the year."

What a subject for Watteau; what a scene for Marivaux! A fountain at sunrise, a legend, a nymph; nature, poetry, and love! To a much less susceptible imagination than Gabriel's the picturesqueness of St. Eustelle's day would have made a powerful appeal. It was so essentially pastoral. And the century, among other inconsistencies, was pastoral too. The breezes of Arcadia had blown over its literature and art; sensibility and seduction, masquerading as shepherds and shepherdesses, got their portraits painted on Madame de Pompadour's porcelain at Sèvres and woven into the royal Gobelins; it was the age of the amorous couplet and the flute, when every *belle marquise* kept her wand and every *grand seigneur* his crook. All the world was pastoral and sentimental. To be a Corydon to some Baucis, a Daphnis to some Chloë—could a subject of Louis the Well-beloved ask more?

So the two cadets went at sunrise to the old Roman

amphitheatre, and among the crowd of nymphs at the fountain of St. Eustelle one in particular attracted the pastoral fancy of Gabriel. He learnt that she was the daughter of the Archer, or chief constable, of Saintes, "and," added his informant, "the less you think of her the better ; the Marquis de Lambert has a prior claim on her affections."

Such a warning was sufficient to reinforce temptation by revenge. To cut out the Colonel, what a triumph that would be ! The Archer's daughter seemed fairer than ever. Her thorns had dropped to the bottom of the fountain without crossing. She turned away disconsolate; there was no marriage for her this year then ? Who was that young cadet in the uniform of the Berri-Cavalerie, whose wonderful eyes were fixed on her so admiringly ? What, the Baron de Pierre-Buffière, of whom all Saintes was talking ! The cadet whom the Colonel was having such difficulty to form !—the Colonel who courted her so passionately, and with what intent ? The uncrossed thorns in the fountain told her too plainly what to expect of the Marquis de Lambert. The next moment Gabriel was at her side.

The *amourette* that followed this meeting soon gave Saintes much to talk of, and the noise it made at the end of its short and tumultuous existence was heard even in the *salons* of Paris. Flushed with hate of the Marquis de Lambert rather than with love of the Archer's daughter, Gabriel laid siege to a heart which surrendered less to his passion than to its own spite. Gabriel whispered to it of marriage, the Marquis de Lambert of seduction. The Archer's daughter granted the former what she had denied the latter, and the good people of Saintes contrasted the honourable intentions of the cadet with the dishonourable ones of the Colonel ; the one conquered the town and the nymph, the other lost both and his honour to boot.

The Marquis de Lambert had known perfectly well

that Gabriel's insubordination had not been directed against his authority as an officer but against his power as a man, and this distinction, which hatred forced him to acknowledge, had stung his pride to the quick. Exasperated by the humility which the cadet affected as a means to avoid the penalty of resisting regimental authority, the Colonel made many efforts to unmask it. But Gabriel suspected his intention and was not to be caught; his conduct remained irreproachable. The injury, therefore, that the Marquis de Lambert's *amour propre* received may be imagined when Gabriel slipped into his private life, like a thief into a house, and having stolen its secrets, carried off its mistress. That he determined to be revenged is a matter of course, but hatred is no respecter of dignity, and it obliged the haughty commander of the Berri-Cavalerie to stoop very low.

While the Marquis de Lambert was planning his revenge, the *amourette* was approaching its *dénouement* by another and more dangerous route. To a generous, impulsive nature like Gabriel's, to receive hospitality without returning it was intolerable, and as his allowance barely covered the necessary regimental expenses, he was tempted to procure the money he needed by exploiting his popularity.

"It seems," the Marquis was informed by Grévin, who, in spite of his flogging, for which Gabriel had apologised, still continued to play the spy, "as if the whole of Saintes was his banker. He borrows from every one, even from the soldiers of the regiment."

But the debts which he owed to this expedient soon involved him in the greatest embarrassment.

From no member of his family was assistance to be obtained; to appeal to his father was not to be dreamt of, and Madame de Vassan, who, indeed, might have been induced to help him, was not to be trusted after the fatal experience he had had of her goodwill.

"There is no other resource left me but the gaming-

table," he said to himself. "These people *must* be paid; they lent me money out of the kindness of their hearts. I cannot see them suffer."

He had a curious, instinctive dislike of gambling which he never overcame, but in a fit of desperation he borrowed eighty louis and determined to sacrifice them on the altar of the god of chance in the hope of relieving his distress. Perhaps the memory of the fear he experienced when he saw the croupier rake up his borrowed louis prevented him from ever again attempting to free himself of debt by gambling. As he turned away sick and dazed from the table a lampoon was put into his hand. He read it mechanically, and his fear was maddened into rage.

To ignore this lampoon, in which he was made the subject of a filthy and malicious caricature, was to proclaim himself a coward—to resent it, to be charged with insubordination. From the cunning of the snare set for him Gabriel guessed the author; if the Marquis de Lambert had not written the lampoon himself, he had inspired it.

"Such an insult calls for blood!" exclaimed one of those who clustered round him.

"A challenge is out of the question," said another. "Do you suppose for a moment that the Colonel of the Berri-Cavalerie would condescend to meet a cadet?"

"If he refuses to meet you, Pierre-Buffière, you must shoot him like a dog," put in a third.

He had thought of that, but that meant death for him too, and Lambert dead should not drag him into the grave. There was nothing left, then, but flight. Whither should he flee? To whom? He suddenly remembered the Duc de Nivernais, whom he had not seen since childhood.

"He was kind to me then," he thought, "perhaps he will be kind to me now, and he has great influence over my father."

The thought obsessed him. Shaking off his companions, who were scarcely less excited than himself, he rushed out into the air, to cogitate in the secrecy of solitude on the means of flight.

The same night, having procured a horse, he galloped out of Saintes unperceived on the road to Paris.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CORSICAN FILIBUSTER

TWO days later, as the last of the Mazarins sat in the library of his house in the Rue Tournon, composing one of those elegant poetical trifles with which he amused his leisure, the following note was handed to him :

"M. LE DUC,—If you still remember my unfortunate existence, I dare to implore your aid. The Marquis de Lambert has offered me an insult so bloody that if I had remained at Saintes I must have killed him. Will you hide me from my father till you have verified my facts ?

"GABRIEL DE MIRABEAU
(Baron de Pierre-Buffière)."

The Duc de Nivernais had by no means forgotten the boy in whom he had formerly taken a lively interest, and he at once despatched a servant to bring Gabriel to him.

"I am very sorry for you, my boy," he said, touched by the story which the travel-stained and exhausted deserter related to him. "I will see your father, who happens to be in Paris, and do what I can for you, but I fear it will not be much."

Gabriel took the hand which Nivernais laid affectionately on his shoulder in both his own, and pressed it to his lips.

"M. le Duc," he said impulsively, "I will trust you

implicitly; I will do whatever you bid me. You are a man of honour!"

The sympathetic nobleman was thrilled by the honesty that glowed in the boy's magnificent eyes and transfigured his scarred face.

"It is the same Gabriel," he said admiringly, "who in the village *fête* at St. Maur so generously gave up the prize he won to the old peasant he beat."

The news of Gabriel's flight, exaggerated by the malice of Grévin, had already reached his father when the Duc de Nivernais arrived at the Hôtel Mirabeau in the Marais. The Marquis was in no mood to listen to reason or to be moved by pity. His indignation was fired less by the thought of his son's insubordination than by his *amourette* and his debts. To contract a *mésalliance* or a debt, could anything more disgraceful befall a Mirabeau?

"He would dissipate twenty fortunes and twelve kingdoms, if he had them!" he stormed.

"Yet," replied Nivernais, with gentle irony, "it is said that the Master of the Economists is the most extravagant man in the kingdom."

This was a thrust at a recent business transaction of the Marquis, who had purchased the estate of the late and last Duc de Roquelaure to have, he said, a greater field for practising his Economic theories, but which, when he found that the ducal title did not go with the ducal *terres*, he had sold again at a great loss.

But if he felt the reproach he did not show it.

"At any rate," he exclaimed, "all the money I have spent has been in the interest of humanity; every sou I have lost my tenants have gained. But this son of mine would sell his name to stake it on the gaming table, and as for his honour, the fact of his offering marriage to an Archer's daughter proves what it is worth. No, the fellow is incurably depraved, hopelessly Vassan!"

"Come, come, Mirabeau," pleaded Nivernais severely,

"remember your own youth. Have you forgotten little Dangerville, the actress? How mad you were over her, when you were Gabriel's age! What devices you invented to find means of obtaining a seat in the theatre in which she played because you had not the money to pay for one! Come, be just. At least see your son and let him plead his cause in person."

"No," retorted the Marquis impatiently; "I know him and his gilded tongue better than you do. He is a liar by instinct. The story he has told you of his wrongs at Saintes is a romance, an eloquent lie that has persuaded you it is true by its effrontery. But I am not to be duped by him, I can assure you."

"Well, then, what command shall I take him from you? I will go surety for his submission."

"I once threatened to send him to the colonies," mused the Marquis; "perhaps I might obtain some post for him in Senegal or Cayenne which would rid me of the care of him altogether."

"Sooner than suffer you to wreak such a vengeance," returned Nivernais sternly, "I will help the boy to leave the country and enter a foreign service, like his uncle the Chevalier."

"In the meantime," continued the father reflectively, without heeding the reproof, "I shall send him back to Saintes, till I can decide what to do with him."

"What, to the Archer's daughter?"

The Marquis winced.

"Oh, as for that," he said, "Lambert will take good care to bolt him into a cell."

Finding that the Marquis was not to be mollified, the Duc de Nivernais abandoned the attempt and prepared to leave.

"You boast of your firmness," he said, rising; "but such a prejudice as yours for your heir is too unreasonable to be natural. The cause, however, is not far to seek. Have a care, Mirabeau," he added boldly, "how you

listen to Madame de Pailly in preference to a friend as disinterested as you know I am. If you suffer your anger to be exploited by her and Lambert you will well deserve the humiliation that will follow. This escapade has all the elements in it of a *cause célèbre.* Be warned in time."

And with this parting shot, which the irascible Economist would have resented from one with whom he was less intimate, the Duc de Nivernais departed.

His warning, however, was not altogether lost on the Marquis. He was aware of the futility of sending Gabriel back to the Berri-Cavalerie after what had happened, and as he feared that Lambert might employ means of reclaiming the deserter which would remove the boy altogether out of his power, he determined to forestall the Colonel. He remembered that in the political system he sought to reform there was one abuse that an unhappy Brutus might even regard as a virtue on occasions of extreme necessity—the *lettre de cachet !*

The thought no sooner occurred to him than he sought to put it into action. To procure this arbitrary order of arrest and imprisonment from the Keeper of the Seals was easy, and thirty-six hours after his arrival in Paris the Baron de Pierre-Buffière was conducted to the Isle of Rhé, of which the Bailli d'Aulan was the Governor, as a prisoner during the pleasure of the Marquis de Mirabeau.

As the younger son of an ancient but impoverished family, the Bailli d'Aulan had started life, some forty years before Gabriel made his acquaintance, with a father's blessing and a sword, Nature having generously added to this modest capital intelligence and a handsome person. A Norman would have carved a fortune out of less, but d'Aulan was a Gascon, and one knows the extraordinary habit marshals' batons and dukedoms have of slipping through a Gascon's fingers !

In the course of a career spent in roving about battle-fields and courts he had picked up nothing more substantial than the governorship of the salt marshes that constituted the Isle of Rhé. Not having been cursed with ambition, the natural cheerfulness of his disposition had not been soured by disappointment ; the unrelenting severity of his character existed entirely in the imagination of the Marquis de Mirabeau, who deluded himself with the ingenuous fancy that the governor of a prison must necessarily be a stern and forbidding man. As a matter of fact, the century had made d'Aulan too easy-going to be rigid in the performance of duty, experience too cynical to be brutal. He was favourably impressed with Gabriel from the first ; as a soldier of fortune, the spirit his prisoner had shown in fleeing from Saintes appealed to him.

"I would have done the same thing myself," he said, "had I been in your place, taking care, however, before leaving the regiment, to pay the Colonel the honour of spitting him on the point of my sword."

But his amiability was not to be construed as weakness ; any attempt to take advantage of it would have been instantly and ruthlessly suppressed. Under the grand *insouciance* of the age of Louis XIV. which he affected there was authority that meant to be obeyed.

"Monsieur," he said, welcoming Gabriel to his lonely fortress, "to avoid the possibility of a future misunderstanding, permit me to be frank. You are absolutely in my power. If you should choose to resent this by a display of insubordination I can, if I choose, confine you, as your father has instructed me, to a dungeon. Or if you should attempt to escape, as so many in your situation have done and will, I dare say, ever continue to do, I should not exceed my authority if I attempted in my turn to prevent you by lodging a couple of bullets in your body. But I refuse to believe that you will put me to the inconvenience of subjecting you to either

of these annoyances, which from all I have heard of you would deprive me of a most agreeable companion. Give me your word of honour that you will treat me with the same consideration as I treat you and I will allow you the liberty of parole."

Gabriel, who had expected to find another Lambert in the Governor of Rhé, quickly detected the olive-branch that was offered him under the airy bombast of this greeting, and he at once accepted it.

"Monsieur d'Aulan," he replied, extending his hand with a frank and engaging gesture, "you have treated me like a gentleman, and I swear to you that if I ever so debase myself as to fail in what is due to you I shall be obliged if you will blow out my brains!"

Imprisonment begun under such auspices promised to be pleasant, but Gabriel's parole soon became to him as tantalising as the water to Tantalus. The freedom of Rhé, with its dreary salt marshes bounded by the sea, was even more depressing than the dungeon to which his father had condemned him. Nor did the friendship of d'Aulan, which he cultivated, relieve his melancholy; excited by listening to the thrilling adventures of the Bailli's past career, he but pined the more for the world from which he was cut off. Touched by his depression, d'Aulan had the boldness to appeal on his behalf to his father, but the Marquis angrily complained of the liberty that the Governor had allowed his prisoner.

"Better leave him alone," sighed Gabriel, "or he may remove me to some other place where I may be worse off than I am here."

But the good-natured d'Aulan did not remain inactive, and an event which occurred six months after his prisoner's arrival at the Isle of Rhé enabled him at last to effect his release.

The Island of Corsica, which had lately come into the possession of the French, rebelled and attempted to assert its independence under the leadership of the brave

Paoli. On the receipt of this news the Court of Versailles determined to vindicate its claim to the sovereignty of the island by force ; the conquest of Corsica should wipe out the disgrace of the recent loss of Canada and India. The national pride was tempted by the cheapness of the laurel, and a call for volunteers met with an enthusiastic response all over France. The Baron de Vioménil, a soldier of fortune and a friend of the Bailli d'Aulan, was given command of a battalion, known as the Legion of Lorraine, which he had been largely instrumental in recruiting ; while the Comte de Vaux, another friend of d'Aulan's, was appointed generalissimo of the expedition. To both he made a strong appeal in behalf of his *protégé*, and they in their turn appealed to the Marquis de Mirabeau. De Vaux even took the trouble to call upon the Marquis in person at Bignon as he journeyed from Versailles to Toulon, where the expedition under his command was awaiting his arrival to embark. The Comte de Vaux was an able general and an experienced man of the world ; under the bluntness of a soldier he concealed the finesse of a diplomatist.

"M. le Marquis," he said, to the intense astonishment of that gentleman, who was not a little flattered by the visit of so distinguished a man, "I have stopped on my way to Corsica to ask you to do the King a favour. The Baron de Vioménil, Colonel of the Legion of Lorraine, is in need of a subaltern, and I can think of no one more likely to honour the commission I have it in my power to bestow than the son of the celebrated author of the *Friend of Men*. Fighting should suit his impetuosity. Let him come with me, and I will hang him at the public expense if he does not prove worthy of his father !"

Under ordinary circumstances the Marquis was not the man to be cajoled by the Comte de Vaux or any one else into releasing his son, with whom he was still very angry, but, stubborn though he was, it was seldom that

he failed to be influenced by the promise of a material advantage. Gabriel's future was a source of great anxiety to him; he could not keep a youth of twenty shut up indefinitely, least of all under a Bailli d'Aulan, who laughed his commands to scorn and turned punishment into a farce. De Vaux's proposal seemed to the Marquis a timely solution to his difficulties, and though he had expressed a strong aversion to this Corsican expedition, which was so opposed to his professed friendship for humanity, he yielded readily and with characteristic inconsistency to the generalissimo's solicitations.

Gabriel received his release and his commission at the same time. At last, then, he was a man and his own master! Surely in the mountains of Corsica it would not be in the power of a father to treat a full-fledged officer as a child. But the Marquis, in permitting him to take part in the "filibustering expedition," as he termed it, by no means intended that he should cease to be under subjection. He regarded Corsica merely as a more suitable prison than the Isle of Rhé, and with unconscious perversity rather than studied malice, which proved, if proof were wanting, his utter incapacity either to understand or to influence his son as he desired, he despatched Grévin to conduct Gabriel to Toulon.

Such a humiliation was not to be borne, and, encouraged by d'Aulan, Gabriel departed from Rhé without waiting for Grévin, who was delayed by the weather.

"You have an excellent excuse," said the Bailli; "time and the Comte de Vaux wait upon no lacquey. If you would sail with the Legion of Lorraine you will be off at once."

The reaction from the depression of the last six months inflamed Gabriel's excitable and reckless nature. He had scarcely left Rhé when his wild spirits and the pride of feeling that he was at last a man caused a difference of opinion between himself and a cashiered officer whom he had known at Saintes. The duel that

resulted, in which he pricked his adversary, gave wings to his heels and added a new zest to the campaign. He arrived at Toulon thirsting for military glory.

Grévin, prevented from arriving at Rhé in time by a wholesome fear of such a travelling companion quite as much as by the weather, endeavoured to make up for his lack of speed by the usual malicious exaggerations with which he reported the son's conduct to the father. And the Marquis, as usual, was only too willing to believe the worst of his heir.

"That Corsican filibuster of mine," he wrote to his brother, "has come out of prison at Rhé a hundred times worse than when he entered it. He no sooner arrived at La Rochelle than he must needs pick a quarrel with a former acquaintance, and a duel ensued, in which his adversary was wounded. Fear of the consequences, no doubt, lent him wings, for the snow, which lay twelve feet thick on the roads, did not detain him, as it did Grévin, whom I sent to accompany him. He, poor fellow, unfortunately could not get beyond St. Jean d'Angely, from whence, finding it impossible to overtake the scoundrel, he has just returned. He reports that everywhere he heard nothing but ill of the Baron de Pierre-Buffière, who, as he proceeded to Toulon, went swearing, fighting, wounding, and committing unheard of villainies. You may imagine with what anxiety I await the report of his conduct in Corsica which the Comte de Vaux has faithfully promised to send me."

In due course this report reached Bignon. It painted the sub-lieutenant of Lorraine in the most brilliant colours. The Marquis learnt with amazement that this wastrel who had so baffled and exasperated him had distinguished himself from the very beginning of the campaign by his bravery and zeal.

"The intelligence he displays," wrote de Vaux, "is remarkable in one so young, and if his conduct off duty is characterised by some rather extravagant gallantries, it

is more than excused by the indefatigable ardour with which he applies himself to the study of military science. His colonel, Vioménil, who, as you know, is not the man to be imposed upon, declares that he has never met with such talent in a subaltern. On his personal recommendation I have the pleasure of informing you, M. le Marquis, that I have conferred a captaincy on your son."

Such a golden opinion from the generalissimo would have delighted the heart of any other father but the Marquis de Mirabeau. His suspicions and prejudices, however, confirmed by years of habit, were not to be charmed away so easily. He regarded the report as a gross exaggeration. Gabriel had the tongue of the Old Serpent, and he had no doubt got round the Comte de Vaux and Vioménil as he had the Abbé Choquard, the Duc de Nivernais, and the Bailli d'Aulan. It hurt his pride to think that a transformation which had resisted his efforts for twenty years could be accomplished in so short a time and without his intervention. He refused to believe that the boy had changed.

In a certain sense he was right. The Baron de Pierre-Buffière of the Legion of Lorraine was no different from Choquard's king of the school or Lambert's cadet—a trifle older, a trifle more experienced perhaps, but still the same. His character had not changed, it never would change. The same virtues that had made him the idol of the school were to make him the idol of the nation ; the same vices that caused his father to declare he would sell his name were to cause the Jacobins to declare that he had sold his country. Nevertheless, a change *had* taken place in Gabriel ; he had eaten of the fruit of the tree of liberty that he found growing in the cannon-tilled, blood-drenched soil of Corsica.

When the novelty of battles and sieges had aged and the glamour of praise and reward had faded, Gabriel began to comprehend something of the despair of the conquered Corsicans. Invasion in the clear, hard light

of reality suddenly lost its charm and conquest its excitement. What *right*, he asked himself, had France to Corsica when the deed of ownership was signed in the blood of its unhappy people? The ability to ask such a question turned the expedition in which he had shown such bravery and zeal into an unjust abuse of power. He was struck by the close resemblance of domestic oppression to political despotism, and as the victim of the former he felt a strange sympathy for those he saw fainting under the latter. The yoke which had galled him, the bruise of which he still bore, seemed light in comparison with that which was pressed upon the neck of a whole people. At the sight of the wounds from which the island bled, the freedom that he owed to this war lost its *élan*, and to be in Corsica on the side of tyranny troubled his conscience like a crime.

Should he throw down his arms, then, and refuse to serve Louis the Well-beloved? Louis the *what?* France rose before him, reflected in the despair of Corsica as if in some magic mirror—France groaning under oppression, sweating blood. Tyranny, like a monstrous anaconda, seemed to have coiled itself round mankind. Oh, for a St. George! The thought inflamed him with all the courage of all the Mirabeaus, his imagination blazed like a pyre on which his heart longed to burn tyranny as the Church used to burn heresy.

It was too late to throw down his arms: the work to which they had been dedicated was finished. He could, however, glorify the freedom he had slain, and into a *History of Corsica* Gabriel poured all the passion, sympathy, and genius of his twenty years.

"I will send it to my father," he said to himself when he had finished it. "As the Friend of Men it will please him, for it breathes hatred of injustice and love of humanity. When he reads it he must give me back my name."

CHAPTER IX

UN-PIERRE-BUFFIÈRED

IN everything he did, in everything he thought, the vanity of the Marquis de Mirabeau was apparent. It was the essence of the unhappy dæmon of which his body was the earthly prison. It possessed the strength of a giant, the unconscious simplicity of a little child, the comicality of a clown. He never attempted to exorcise it, though it often tormented him to distraction. He obeyed its caprices like a slave and followed it whither it listed unresistingly. It had made him climb the mountain of the Ideal, to hurl him, as he hoisted the flag of the Friend of Men on the summit, into the abyss of Disillusion. But bleeding he picked himself up and stubbornly followed the voice of the devil within him, while scandal pelted him as he passed with its filth, and ridicule barked at his heels. Even sorrow could not entice him to halt.

While Gabriel was in Corsica the Marquise Dowager had died at Bignon under circumstances that were exceptionally distressing. A severe illness with which she was afflicted in her eightieth year had left her a raving maniac, and in this state she had lingered three years. Her insanity took a form in which every trait for which she had been noted was perverted. Devout, she had shrieked anathemas against God; forbidding in her propriety, she refused to wear clothing; refined, the devil that possessed her spoke the language of low

brothels and gave her at eighty the passions of a harlot! This horrible tragedy had been rendered still more tragic by occasional glimmerings of intelligence. In these moments the Marquise Dowager, realising with horror the character of her malady, would prostrate herself in an agony of penitence before the fragments of her crucifix, only to rise more frenzied than ever. To the Marquis, reverencing his mother as few mothers are reverenced, struggling in vain to regenerate his country which he beheld carelessly drifting towards revolution, baffled by a son whom he regarded as hopelessly depraved and by the dissensions of a family he could not govern, it had seemed as if this last blow of fate made the burden of life insupportable.

Nevertheless, his inflexible spirit, consoled by the unswerving friendship of his brother and the devotion of the sorceress who had bewitched him with the magic of her flattery, faced adversity with the indomitable courage of the Mirabeaus. The vanity, too, of which he was the slave now and then rewarded him for his obedience. There were times when it soothed, petted, and caressed him; it was for these moments that the Marquis de Mirabeau deigned to continue in this vale of tears. An order of Vasa, a letter from a "disciple," the intimidation of his wife, the subjection of his son, helped him to support disappointment, disillusion, and despair with what his vanity made him believe was philosophy.

It was this colossal vanity, artfully encouraged by Madame de Pailly for her own ends, that prevented him from forgiving his son, of whom, from those most deserving of credence, he heard nothing but good. For a moment, indeed, when Gabriel's *History of Corsica* arrived at Bignon, it had seemed as if he must relent. The enthusiasm that inspired his own ponderous works on Economy had vibrated in sympathy with that of his son.

"With such a pen," he exclaimed to Madame de Pailly, carried away by the intensity of Gabriel's passionate *peccavi* to Liberty, "something may be made of the fellow after all. He writes with fire, imagination, genius, and the principles he professes indicate a good heart!"

Madame de Pailly, however, took quite a different view of a work which was capable of effecting a reconciliation to which she was opposed.

"I agree with you," she said craftily, "Gabriel undoubtedly has a clever pen. The book is a brilliant *tour de force*. But Versailles is sure to resent it."

"Versailles!" echoed the Marquis in astonishment.

"It is a tocsin, an incentive to revolution," she exclaimed, observing with satisfaction the lengthening of his face. "Its appearance just as this Corsican rebellion is crushed would undoubtedly be regarded in the highest quarters as dangerous to order, like your *Théorie de l'Impôt* at the close of the Seven Years' War. Who knows?—perhaps *you* as the father of the author, who is not yet of age, may be held responsible for its publication, and suffer the imprisonment or exile to which he would otherwise be condemned."

"H'm," mused the Marquis, "I had not thought of that."

"There is, too," continued his evil genius, carefully measuring her words, "another impression that I formed on reading this clever book, one which, I confess, may appear unjust to Gabriel, but knowing him I cannot eradicate it. Has it occurred to you that his lofty principles, which till now no one ever imagined he was capable of conceiving, are cunningly devised to deceive you by feigning a character he does not possess, to cajole you into pardoning him?"

At once, as Madame de Pailly intended, the manuscript lost its merit in the Marquis' eyes, and all his former suspicion of his son, fostered by years of prejudice, revived.

But though the *History of Corsica* was never destined to be printed, the effect it had produced on the Marquis was not altogether obliterated. He was haunted with a doubt that the glowing report he had received from the Comte de Vaux might after all be justified; and having thus admitted the possibility of his son's reformation, the strict sense of justice on which he prided himself obliged him to put this reformation to the test. As his pride would not permit him to make the experiment in person, he shifted the responsibility on to his brother.

"The Bailli," he said to himself, "is not the man to be duped by the fellow's glib tricks; his opinion at least may be relied on."

So, when the Corsican expedition returned to France, the Marquis commanded Gabriel on landing at Marseilles "to go to Mirabeau and kiss his uncle's hand."

The Bailli, who may be said to come now for the first time personally into Gabriel's life, possessed, like all the Mirabeaus, a strong and original individuality. At the age of three his father had obtained his admission into the Order of Malta, to which the family had an hereditary claim, and ten years later he entered the service of the Knights as midshipman. Freed thus early from the severe restraint to which Col d'Argent subjected his sons, the boy yielded eagerly to all the temptations to which he was exposed. Suddenly, after three months of reckless dissipation, like his brother the Marquis, he cried a stern halt to his passions. Asked once how he came to pull himself up so suddenly at an age when a passionate, headstrong boy is seldom capable of self-control or reflection, he had replied in the curious euphuistic manner of speaking that was characteristic of all the Riquetis:

"The prison of the galleys put water into my wine."

But as in his family punishment never restrained a passion or reformed a vice, the remarkable sobriety

which the Bailli ever after displayed must be attributed to some innate cause. Be this as it may, he was promoted for good conduct to the rank of lieutenant, and at seventeen ambition and patriotism induced him to second to the royal navy, which was then engaged in disputing the command of the ocean with England. By the time he was twenty he had sailed in every sea in which there was a blow to be given or received. He had been twice wounded and once taken prisoner when in his thirtieth year he was given command of a frigate. Three years later found him Governor of Guadeloupe in the West Indies, with a brilliant record behind him and the promise of a still more brilliant future ahead of him.

Like his brother the Marquis, he had applied himself diligently to improving his mind, and on his return to France on account of ill-health, which he attributed, perhaps rightly, less to the climate of the tropics than to the strictness of his morals, the Bailli de Mirabeau was quite as remarkable for his brilliant and accomplished mental attainments as for his reputation for virtue, which in an age of universal corruption had kept him chaste and poor.

"I could," he said to his brother, "have returned home rich had I followed the usual custom and prostituted my position for gain. I had innumerable chances of selling posts and accepting bribes."

Having repaired his health by a sojourn of some months at the Château de Mirabeau, he was anxious once more to resume his career. Ambitious like all his family, it was too much to expect him, when not yet forty, to retire and turn squire in Provence. So he came to Bignon and Paris and figured for a time in society, where his grand air, handsome person, and wit at once put the world at his feet.

The Riquetis had ever wished to be summoned to the Council of the King; it had been the dream of the Marquis to be Controller of Finance, it was the Bailli's

to be Minister of Marine. Till now his rise had been due entirely to his own merit, but the advancement he desired was scarcely to be had without employing influence—in a word, without asking favours, and this the Bailli, like the Marquis, was too proud to do.

"I am ready to serve my King," he said to his friends who were powerful and eager to help him; "if he needs me, he has but to send for me. But a man of honour should not sue for the favour of a harlot, nor will a Mirabeau ever stoop to the Marquise de Pompadour, who for all her splendid title is but Jeanne Poisson, *bourgeoise!*"

This proud resolve, however, yielded to a *mot* of Louis the Well-beloved.

"Oh," that monarch was reported to have said to a courtier who was bewailing the destruction of the navy in the Seven Years' War, "we still have the sailors and ships in M. Vernet's pictures."

To a man who had a scheme for recreating the navy, the levity of such a remark uttered by a King of France was intolerable. Patriotism demanded him to sacrifice his pride to his country before the frivolous indifference of Versailles completed, as his brother predicted, the complete ruin of the nation. So he permitted his friend the Abbé de Bernis, who was shortly to owe his cardinal's hat to the Pompadour, to present him to the mistress who governed the kingdom.

From the moment he entered her presence he was conscious of his humiliation; nevertheless he tried to please, and appeared to be succeeding, when Madame de Pompadour said suddenly:

"What a pity that you Mirabeaus are such hot-headed men!"

The words were like a match applied to a train of gunpowder.

"It is true," he said bluntly, unable to control himself, "that such is the title of legitimacy in my family, but

cool heads have been guilty of so many follies that it might perhaps be wise for a change to make a trial of hot brains. At all events, they could not do more harm!"

One of his ancestors had once dared to address Louis XIV. with equal plainness, but unlike that monarch, who was great enough to make allowances for the "madness," as he termed it, of the Riquetis, Madame de Pompadour was incapable of forgiving such a slight. And thus ended the dream of the Bailli.

He went back to Mirabeau, where, with an occasional visit to Malta, he continued to reside till the Revolution. Inordinately proud of his name, he lived to see it covered with ridicule and dishonour, from which it was gloriously redeemed only to be extinguished. The respect in which he was held did not prevent a mob in the mad days of the Terror from burning the Château de Mirabeau, after having flung his library into the castle well. The Bailli had, however, left France before this last humiliation for Malta, where twenty years before he had, on his retirement from the navy, been appointed commander-general of the galleys. Resuming the duties of this post, which during his long absence had been performed by a deputy, he befriended all the nobles in distress who fled from his native Provence to Malta, and died fortunately before the Revolution invaded Malta and subverted the Order of the Knights itself. His marble tomb may still be seen in the grand old church of the Knights at Malta, adorned with the arms of the Mirabeaus and an epitaph in Latin.

Very Riqueti of very Riqueti, the Bailli might be described as the *revers de médaille* of his brother, to whom he was bound by a friendship that not even Madame de Pailly could break. All the vices in the character of the Marquis became virtues in the Bailli, whose one fault—an invincible weakness for condoning those of his brother—was in the Marquis his one untarnished virtue.

The knowledge of the great influence his uncle exercised over his father had more than once suggested to Gabriel the advisability of courting his favour.

"If I could but once talk to my uncle," he had said to d'Aulan and others, "I am confident that I could convince him of my ardent desire to win my father's regard and persuade him to plead my cause."

He had, therefore, received his father's command with joy, and obeyed it with alacrity. The Bailli, on the other hand, advised of his nephew's approaching visit, and believing him to be all that he had been painted to him, awaited his arrival with a resentment of which the Marquis was perfectly aware, and on which Madame de Pailly in particular counted. The surprise of both may, therefore, be imagined when the Marquis received the following letter from his brother, written within twenty-four hours of Gabriel's arrival at the Château de Mirabeau :

"Last night M. de Pierre-Buffière, following your instructions, came here on a visit to me. I am delighted with him. He is ugly, as I expected, but he has not a bad countenance ; behind the ravages of the small-pox there is something intelligent, attractive, and noble. He is one of the cleverest and ablest fellows of his years I have ever met, and I believe that he can become anything he desires—general, admiral, minister, pope, what you will. He seems to fear you dreadfully, but he swore there was nothing he would not do to please you. I was ready to cry when he exclaimed in a transport, 'Oh, would my father but give me back my name ! I know he thinks I am too base to bear it with honour, yet if he would but try me, I will prove to him I am worthy of his confidence !' I assure you he is very repentant. Forgive him and grant his request ; we have all been mistaken in him. If he doesn't dupe me—and I will bet a hundred to one he doesn't—I am convinced he will become the greatest of our line !"

But the extravagance of the Bailli's praise only defeated its object. The Marquis, having formed quite a different opinion of his son, was in his stubborn pride unwilling to alter it. He had sent Gabriel to Mirabeau because he believed that the Bailli would confirm his opinion; to find his brother agreeing with the Comte de Vaux, and that, too, apparently at the mere sight of the boy, was profoundly mortifying to his self-love. To admit that the Bailli was right, he would be forced to admit that *he* was wrong. To one so proud as the Marquis the humiliation of such an admission was rendered the more bitter by the thought of the gross injustice of which it convicted him. To be proved both in the wrong and unjust, could anything be more intolerable to Quixote-Brutus Riqueti?

As it was, however, Madame de Pailly's pleasure—one had almost said her duty, for on the skill with which she harmonised his inordinate vanity and sense of justice depended her influence—to persuade the Marquis that he was in the right, he was saved from this mortification.

"I do not thank you," he hastened to reply to his brother in a tone of sarcastic reproof, "for the reception you have given my son. The romance with which he perfumes himself from top to toe appears to have affected your judgment. If you trust him he will mould you to his liking. Let me advise you to beware of the gilded bill of your tame canary."

Gabriel's conquest of his uncle was due, perhaps, less to his determination to please than to the excitement he suddenly brought into the Bailli's monotonous existence. The curiosity to see this nephew, of whom he had heard so much that was ill, against whom he had been so strongly prejudiced, and whom he had not seen since childhood, had unconsciously given the boy an importance in his uncle's eyes that was of itself a sort of fascination. Expecting to see an ugly, sullen, cringing fellow, whom he intended to receive with great formality, the

Bailli was astonished by Gabriel's unexpected arrival some hours before he was due, by his vivacious manners and frank countenance. Before he could recover from his surprise all his prejudices had been conquered by the feeling of pride and delight he experienced.

"I may be your dupe," he said, remembering what he had been told of Gabriel's talent for getting round people, "but I do not think so."

Gabriel sustained the searching gaze with which his uncle looked at him without flinching, and replied impulsively:

"If not to reverence a name I am not permitted to bear, if to be born a Mirabeau and to be content to be known as a Pierre-Buffière, if not to long unceasingly, to try by every art, to recover a birthright so honourable as mine is to be worthy of your good opinion, then, uncle, you are my dupe!" And with clasped hands he entreated his uncle to believe in his sincerity.

Such an appeal, to which his own intense pride of birth rendered him particularly susceptible, confirmed the favourable first impression that the Bailli had formed of his nephew. In the navy and at Malta, where he had had wide experience of young men, whom nobody could manage but himself, he had often expressed the opinion that in the young there was seldom a vice that was not a corrupted virtue. He recalled this now, and he decided to employ the same method in dealing with his nephew that had been so successful on former occasions.

"Everything depends on yourself," he said kindly. "You are here on trial; prove deserving of my trust and you will find a good friend in me. But don't imagine that because I am keeping my eye on you I am playing the schoolmaster. I want you to confide in me."

"Play the schoolmaster!" echoed Gabriel. "If my father had but employed the same means that you do, he could have got me to do anything, and if you can but

persuade him to receive me, he will believe in me as you have done."

His power of seduction, of which he was fully conscious, and to which the Bailli, though warned against it, had yielded, was now employed with a cunning worthy of Madame de Pailly to obtain his father's forgiveness by means of his uncle's intervention. But now, as was ever the case, whether his object was premeditated or spontaneous, selfish or generous, when he tried to charm people the sheer desire to please gave to his wiles a sincerity that deceived even himself. Completely under his spell, the Bailli left no stone unturned to effect a reconciliation on which he believed the future happiness of his family depended. The average of his weekly correspondence with his brother, with whom in the course of forty years he exchanged nearly four thousand letters, was greatly increased during Gabriel's visit. Scarcely a day passed but the Marquis was informed of his son's reformation. At one time the infatuated Bailli would dilate on Gabriel's desire for employment.

"As his commission," he wrote, "no longer entails any duties, now that there is every prospect of a long peace, perhaps you will consent to allow him to leave the army. Vioménil has offered to take him to Hungary, where there is work for a soldier that a lover of liberty need not be ashamed of—such as fighting the Turks, which, I am sure, would be compatible with your philosophy. Sooner than be idle he is willing to do anything, even to join the navy. Here, he works like a galley-slave on the estate, and is of the same service to my legs as my spectacles are to my eyes."

At another time it was Gabriel's popularity on which the uncle harped. The Marquis learnt that the "whole country-side rings with his praises, from the old Baron de Langier, who is much gratified at the respect Gabriel always shows him when he comes here, down to the

peasants, with whom he is a hail-fellow-well-met, even going to the length of sharing their coarse fare." (For a noble before the Revolution this was magnanimity indeed, and must, the Bailli thought, appeal to the Marquis, who was in the habit of doing the same at Bignon.) "Whilst," he added, "in his regiment he was universally popular, for I begged the Abbé de Castagny to make inquiries, quite casually, of some of the officers who chanced to be in his neighbourhood, and, to a man, they spoke of him with enthusiasm."

Again, Gabriel's generous, chivalrous nature was the subject of his uncle's eulogy; or his passion for reading and study; or his immense pride of race. And ever the burden of all the Bailli's letters was the same:

"Remember his youth and the saltpetre mixed in our blood. Give him back his name, and receive him as one for whom I have gone bail!"

But the implacable father turned a deaf ear to all these appeals, though once he sent a copy of his new book, the *Catechism of Economy*, to Mirabeau, with the advice that Gabriel should become "thoroughly acquainted with my works"—an act of vanity which for a moment the boy and his uncle took as a sign of approaching forgiveness. At last, however, when even the Bailli began to despair of effecting the reconciliation he was striving for, two events occurred to bring about this long-desired result. The first was the death of M. de Pailly in Lausanne, which necessitated the departure for Switzerland of his widow, from whom he had so long been "amicably" separated, whereby the Marquis was temporarily freed from her malign influence. The second was the death of old Madame de Vassan.

This event brought the Marquis post-haste to Limousin to claim her fortune, to the half of which, as his wife's *dot*, he believed himself entitled, and the whole of which he meant to control by virtue of the authority the law gave a husband over the property of a wife. The

Marquise de Mirabeau, however, was equally determined to oppose her husband's claim, and she at once instituted proceedings for a divorce and the absolute control of her fortune.

This lawsuit, which was to last for fourteen years and end in the complete social and financial ruin of both litigants, was like a guerilla in which every victory was a disaster, every defeat incomplete, all honour and decency shamelessly discarded, and no strategy too base to be employed. The Marquise de Mirabeau fired the first shot by appealing to her children, who were her ultimate heirs, to take her part, promising to pay at once and well for their aid. Whereupon, to out-manœuvre her, the Marquis, to whom his children could be of as much assistance as to his wife, flung dignity to the winds and adopted the same tactics. On arriving in Limousin he wrote to the Bailli that he would receive Gabriel and "make him the great present of his name" *on the understanding that he would refuse to listen to his mother's appeal.*

The Bailli was too devoted to his brother and too hostile to the Marquise, to whom he attributed all the Marquis' domestic misfortunes, to consider the glaring immorality of such a proposal, or the danger to a reconciliation based on it. He received his brother's letter with joy. As for Gabriel, the desire to win back his name obscured every other consideration. Having from his birth had the misfortune to be placed between parents continually at variance and who had displayed the fiercest hatred in his presence, he saw nothing unusual in this latest device of one to get the better of the other. During the five years that had elapsed since he had suffered for siding with his mother she had made no effort to correspond with him or to testify in any way her gratitude. She had passed out of his life, and with absence had come indifference. At heart he cared as little for his father; it was only the *benefit* to be derived

from his favour that made him fancy he respected him. Bubbling over with youth, energy, and ambition, he found himself checked and thwarted at every turn by a hostility which appeared to him the only obstacle to happiness. To overcome this he was ready to jump at any chance, and within an hour of the receipt of his father's letter at Mirabeau he was on his way to Limousin.

Six months later the Bailli, who had learnt with delight of his nephew's complete reconciliation with the Marquis and of the continuance of their good relations, received the following letter from his brother, who was once more in Paris, whither Madame de Pailly had also returned :

"This is to inform you that I have grown tame, for I once swore to you that neither of my sons should visit Paris before he was twenty-five, as the disorder it produces on a youthful mind is the first step to the gallows. Notwithstanding, the Comte de Mirabeau, though hardly twenty-one, has spent the whole winter in the capital, and enjoyed, moreover, the liberty to do as he pleases. Your nephew has been well received everywhere. He has already been presented at Versailles, and to-day he is to be received by the Duc d'Orléans and the Prince de Condé. The Guéménées and the Noailles are like relations to him : they think him as playful as a young pointer dog, and Madame de Durfort says that he would upset the dignity of any Court. He is like a duck, dabbling, gabbling, quacking, and diving after flies. The time he does not devote to society he spends in study ; sometimes he passes the whole day in my library. But Madame de Pailly finds his presence fatiguing, and though I cannot help regarding his popularity as a compliment to myself, I do not wish him to remain here any longer patrolling the dirty ways of intrigue and skating on the thin ice of favour. So I have

decided that it is time the Comte de Mirabeau married and settled down. Send me a list of the marriageable heiresses in Provence."

Gabriel's boyhood was past; henceforth to the world he was to be known by the name he had won back—the name of Mirabeau *tout court.*

PART II

THE MAN

CHAPTER I

COURTSHIP À LA MIRABEAU

THAT the Marquis de Mirabeau would permit his children to marry to please themselves was, it goes without saying, impossible. When choosing husbands and wives for them, love never entered his calculations; a "love match" meant to him something unprofitable and discreditable. In the sphere to which he belonged such unions were extremely rare, and when they had occurred they were nearly always preceded and followed by scandal. He judged and condemned them all as social crimes. The memory of the "love match" of his brother, the Chevalier, with Mademoiselle Navarre, the actress, had completely obliterated that of his father, Col d'Argent, with Mademoiselle de Castellane *sans dot.*

He obliged his eldest son to marry as he had obliged himself—to prolong his race. In his opinion this was the chief value of eldest sons, and the only value, as far as he could see, of the thankless one he had begotten. As an Economist he regarded marriage as a physical institution of society, not as a spiritual sacrament. To a Brutus with an eldest son to dispose of, this physical institution possessed certain utilitarian virtues which could only practically and economically manifest themselves by the aid of the *mariage de convenance.* In other words, marriage was the commerce of Nature by which society, as the Marquis de Mirabeau understood it, was offered certain material benefits that it never despised.

After his own matrimonial experiences, however, one would have thought that he would have considered these benefits dear at the price, and have expected to find him displaying more prudence in a negotiation on which it was natural to presume the future of his house depended. But experience had taught the Marquis nothing; he neither could nor would learn its lessons. Thus when he decided that the time had come for his heir to marry, it was birth and fortune he went a-wooing as before. Likewise, it was not from among the Guéménées, the Noailles, or the Montmorencys that he sought the future Comtesse de Mirabeau. As in the past, it was to his native Provence that he turned his haughty gaze.

"In Provence," he mused, "if there is any snubbing to be done it will at least be the Mirabeaus who will have the pleasure of doing it."

But the quest of an heiress who would answer the Marquis' requirements was no easy matter. In the first place heiresses were rare down there; in the second, it was difficult to find one without a "tinge of yellow" in her blood. "Yellow," as it was defined in Provence, signified a Moorish or Jewish strain, which excluded such families from the Order of Malta. For the heir of the Marquis de Mirabeau to marry a "yellow," whatever her fortune, was of course out of the question, and as there was scarcely a noble family in Provence in whose veins this humiliating colour did not flow, some idea of the Marquis' initial difficulties may be imagined.

These were, however, surmounted by the aid of the Bailli, who acted as the matrimonial agent of his brother.

"I have found," he wrote, "an heiress whose birth and fortune are thoroughly satisfactory, as I am sure you will agree when I tell you that she is the only child of our ridiculous neighbour, the Marquis de Marignane. The match would be particularly advantageous to us, for the

Mirabeau and Marignane estates, if united, would form a small principality. There is, however, an obstacle. The heiress is already promised. But promises, as you know, have been broken before now. Our rival wants a bigger *dot* than he is likely to get. This proves him a fool, for by insisting on converting a safe expectation into cash he may lose it altogether. We shall be able to outbid this fellow, or Marignane is a greater idiot than I think him."

The Marquis had no sooner read this letter than he sent for Mirabeau and informed him that a wife had been found for him, who she was, what her fortune. Referring to the little obstacle mentioned by the Bailli, the father added banteringly:

"It is the sort of adventure that should appeal to a madman, and as it would be useless for me to try to dissuade you, it is better for you to start at once. How that pock-marked face of yours, which I once sent to Provence to frighten insolent tenants, is to find the means of being accepted, desired, and sought after in marriage, is more than I can tell. But it is a puzzle to which you, no doubt, have the key."

As the future head of his house, Mirabeau knew it was his duty to secure the succession, a duty that as a Riqueti he would not have dreamt of shirking. Had his heart been previously involved, or his fancy engaged, his spirit would have rebelled against the idea of marrying a woman he had never seen; but as it was he had no objection to obeying his father's command. Nor in principle was he averse to a *mariage de convenance;* it did not clash with his ideal of love: that was not to be trammelled by any legal or religious rite. If he thought of the unhappiness a loveless union had brought to his parents it did not cause him misgiving; it was, he knew, to no tyrannical convention that their lives had been sacrificed, but to their intense and intolerable selfishness. Moreover, this marriage, of which he anticipated none of the

inconveniences, meant to him something besides duty. Basking in the sunshine of his father's favour, he remembered the cheerless temperature in which the greater part of his life had been passed. There was nothing he dreaded so much as the clouding of his sun; to refuse to obey his father would have been the height of folly, to obey was to maintain his independence, to complete his manhood. So it was with the lightest of hearts that he set out for Provence.

In the meantime at Aix, whither Mirabeau was hastening, the curtain had risen on one of those little comedies of manners which were very frequently played in the French provinces before the Revolution. As the heiress he was questing was the heroine of it, while he himself was to act the leading *rôle*, some idea of the characters and the plot, as the obstacles he had to surmount may be defined, is necessary.

Aix, the scene of the play, was the ancient capital of Provence; a town "no bigger than a snuff-box," as the Marquis de Mirabeau contemptuously described it. Its importance had long since vanished, but its hot springs, which had been in great repute in the days of the Romans, were still patronised by the petty *noblesse* of the province, many of whom resided either in the town or its immediate neighbourhood, and who had never been to Paris in their lives. The chief, indeed, the only occupation of these people was the pursuit of pleasure. Art, politics, philosophy, economy were conspicuous by their absence; if the society of Aix had heard of such things it had quickly forgotten them. Their place was taken by petty gossip, scandal, intrigue, and frivolity.

The leader of this little world was a certain Comte de Valbelle, whose manner of pursuing pleasure had given him a prestige which, perhaps, considering the society of which he was the mirror, he deserved. If Aix was like a snuff-box, the Comte de Valbelle might be described as the picture that ornamented the lid—a caricature of a

Provençal knight of the days of the troubadours. After a long and insignificant career in the army, during which he had derived no benefit from experience, he preserved the love of pleasure without youth and the love of romance without sincerity.

The King, on a caprice of the moment, had created him lord-lieutenant of Provence, and this dignity had set the seal of folly on the man and all his actions. His vanity demanded that he should live in a style he deemed worthy of his office, and to this his wealth enabled him to make an eloquent response. But in the effort to affect a dignity which was not natural to him he merely succeeded in making himself ridiculous. His conception of the *rôle* of lord-lieutenant was that of a master of ceremonies.

"Valbelle's love of ostentation, which he would have had people take for magnificence," wrote the Bailli on his death a few years later to the Marquis, "has even displayed itself in his will, for he has left a legacy to the Academy, which certainly did not proceed from any taste for literature, of which he was as ignorant as of china."

Of the pomps that he "stage-managed"—no other word will serve—the one most characteristic of the man and those who flocked around him was a revel to which he gave the name of the Court of Love. Nothing so splendid, so romantic, it was declared, had been known in Provence since the time of King René, and all who had enjoyed the privilege of participating in this display of magnificence desired to perpetuate its memory. Of the various suggestions made in this respect, that of the Marquis de Marignane was generally admitted to be the happiest.

"The lord-lieutenant," he said, "is the King's representative, and as such holds his Court at Aix; why should not we, the *noblesse* of Provence who form it, give it a name? The King calls his the Court of

Versailles; the lord-lieutenant's should be known as the Court of Love."

He who gave to the society of Aix a title that so aptly described it was one of its chief ornaments. To the Marquis de Mirabeau, who, while despising him, was anxious to form an alliance with him, the Marquis de Marignane presented a marked contrast. Two men more unlike it would have been impossible to find. Their only point of resemblance lay in the fact that both had quarrelled with their wives. But even in this they differed, for the scandal which had made the separation of the Friend of Men from his wife notorious had passed over that of the Marquis de Marignane from his with no noise at all. M. and Madame de Marignane lived apart on the best of terms; she continued to reside at the Château de Marignane, while he, thoroughly detesting and neglecting the duties of a *grand seigneur*, abandoned the care of his estate to a bailiff and went to live at Aix. No one in the Court of Love sought pleasure more languidly or more consistently. The Marquis de Marignane did not begin his search for amusement till noon. Regularly every day at this hour he would remove his feet from the mantelpiece on which they had reposed during the morning, rise from his easy chair, discard his newspaper, and after spending the afternoon over his toilette he would proceed to fritter away the evening at a dance or a supper, a concert or theatre. Gaudier, lazier drone did not exist in the whole hive of France during these waning years of the *ancien régime*, from which Revolution, like a queen-bee long nourished by countless workers, was waiting to issue on its phenomenal nuptial flight, fatal to drones.

The Bailli, in his letter to his brother, had spoken of him as "our ridiculous neighbour," and the implication contained in these words had increased the attraction that the marriage between his daughter and Mirabeau had for the Marquis. He coveted the rich Marignane

estates, in such close proximity to those of Mirabeau ; he longed to administer them, to improve them as he had his own by his system of economy, to merge them, reclaimed and enriched, in his marquisate, which might thus be converted into a dukedom for him to offer to his race, reverently as one offers a gift to a shrine. Marignane was a fool, and when it came to the question of marriage settlements the Friend of Men preferred to deal with a fool, especially a rich one, than with a man of business. He never stopped to consider the arguments against the alliance he sought ; perhaps if he had he would in his avarice have disregarded them. There was one, however, which should have convinced him, believing as he did in heredity, of the danger to be apprehended from this match. Separation after marriage was a sort of tradition in the family of Mademoiselle de Marignane. Her grandmother, like her mother, lived apart from her husband !

Narrow and superstitious as such an objection might have seemed, it would, however, have found its apology in Mademoiselle de Marignane herself. Her appearance and character alike, one would have said, manifested her predisposition to the lamentable failing of her family. The amiability with which she was not unjustly credited, and the colourless nature of which was indicated by a perpetual and inane smile, was not rendered more attractive by a bad figure and a plain face. She entirely lacked the physical charm on which the post-nuptial happiness of a *mariage de convenance* so largely depends. But Nature had been less unkind to her than circumstances. In more favourable surroundings than those in which she had passed the eighteen years of her life, it is probable that the sensibility with which she overflowed would have had a healthy development. Gifted with a passion for music, her voice, which was good, had never been trained nor her taste cultivated. The same lack of education was manifested in the *gaucherie* of her manners,

the vulgarity of her sense of humour, and the flightiness of her ideas. Since the separation of her parents, who had when living together neglected her, she had been brought up by her maternal grandmother, the Marquise de Maliverni, an old harridan who scolded her from morning to night and ordered her about like a servant. Conscious in some vague, inarticulate way that a great wrong had been done to her character, Emilie de Marignane looked to marriage to rectify it. With her expectations she had not lacked offers, and had her choice depended on herself she would in her desire for freedom willingly have accepted the first proposal. Her father, perhaps, who was in his selfish way fond of her, might have been persuaded to suffer her to marry one of her many suitors without undue delay ; but she had to reckon with her terrible grandmother. The Marquise de Maliverni had given a free rein to her ambition, and the game she was hunting was no other than the lord-lieutenant himself.

To provide the Comte de Valbelle with a wife was, however, the object of others besides the Marquise de Maliverni. In fact, the Court of Love clamoured for a queen, and the sovereign at length resolved to satisfy the popular demand. But intrigue, which flourished as vigorously at Aix as at Versailles, was equally resolved to prevent him. In his Court of Love the lord-lieutenant had been amusing himself by playing with fire. Its flame, which eventually burnt him, proceeded from the heart of a certain Madame des Rolands, a young and artful woman who was the wife of an octogenarian husband, whose death she was impatiently expecting. On this event she had built plans and hopes that the marriage of the Comte de Valbelle to another than herself would have destroyed, and to avert this holocaust she had recourse to tears, threats, and entreaties. But finding that no appeal to his heart or his honour would dissuade him, Madame des Rolands had summoned to her aid the

Marquis de la Valette. This young fool was one of the suitors of Mademoiselle de Marignane, and as her prospects of becoming queen of the Court of Love seemed more favourable than those of the others who were eligible for the honour, Madame des Rolands used her influence and abilities, which were great, to help his suit.

So cleverly did she play her game that the Marquise de Maliverni, duped by an intrigue she did not suspect, was induced to abandon the pursuit of Valbelle at the very moment that individual was on the eve of proposing for her granddaughter's hand. And Madame des Rolands had the triple satisfaction of having outwitted the wiliest woman in Aix, revenged herself on a faithless lover, and gained the cause of her *protégé*. To Mademoiselle de Marignane, however, it mattered not whether they married her to ridiculous old Valbelle or ridiculous young Valette ; in her desire for freedom she would have married the devil himself, even though his pedigree was "yellow."

Such was the first act of the little comedy played at Aix. When the curtain rose again, the Marquis de Marignane and Valette were discovered haggling over the marriage settlements. It was at this moment that Mirabeau appeared on the scene.

In all squirearchies the absentee is invested with the prestige of curiosity. To these petty Provençaux the fame of the Marquis de Mirabeau, whose family was so closely connected with the province, seemed to draw them into its radius. Their vanity gave him a popularity that his presence among them would surely have dispelled ; their gossip exaggerated his fortune ; and their hospitality overwhelmed his son. The arrival of the young Comte de Mirabeau at Aix was an event of which the sensation was increased by the glamour of Paris and Versailles that enveloped him.

"Have you heard that the little Princess Elizabeth

made a poem on his pock-marked face that convulsed the Court?" said one.

"And have you heard," said another, "that the Duchesse de Durfort declared he had more wit than anyone at Versailles?"

The provincial imagination professed to detect the air of the Court in everything he said or did; his manners, to which his "terrible gift of familiarity" gave an indefinable charm, made those of the fops of Aix appear boorish; his tongue, "persuasive as the Old Serpent," attuned its music to every ear. He lacked but the glitter of wealth to have paled the star of the lord-lieutenant himself. He gave out that he had come to Aix to manage his father's estate in the neighbourhood, and in order to disarm suspicions that might defeat the real purpose of his visit, he paid his court to several ladies simultaneously.

In this manner, wrapped in popularity as if in some invisible cloak, Mirabeau succeeded in slipping into the house of the Marquise de Maliverni. Once within, to steal the heart of Emilie de Marignane was an easy matter; to make off with it not so easy.

Born with the sun of Provence in her veins and its poetry in her brain, the heiress was romantic. Neglect and severity had failed to stifle the affections imprisoned in her heart. Like some lady of an old romance in a dungeon, they awaited their unknown deliverer with many a weary sigh. To her languishing love her suitors had been so many possible knights-errant, but one and all they had passed the castle of her heart without attempting to free its victim. It is true, the Marquis de la Valette, simpering coxcomb, had ridden up and flung open her dungeon door, but she had guessed at a glance that it was not in a spirit of chivalry that he had come. Her marriage with him would be another form of captivity; one, however, from which there was a possibility of escape. And her love resolved to take the first

chance that offered. In this mood the Comte de Mirabeau came caracoling into her life.

Appearing in all the prestige in which novelty and popularity had clothed him, he fixed her attentions from the first. He saw that he had created an impression and he exerted himself to the utmost to please her. He had been unhappy, he had been slighted and neglected, he had suffered. She thought of her own dreary past, and its resemblance to his awoke her sympathy. Her grandmother, to whom he had been assiduous from the first in those little attentions that old women like to receive from young men, remarked in her hearing one night at a concert:

"No doubt he will marry some Mademoiselle de Guéménée or de Noailles. It is hardly in Provence that the Marquis de Mirabeau will think a wife worthy of his son could be found."

Emilie de Marignane was conscious of an emotion she had never before experienced. It was so strong as to cause her pain. She tried to analyse it, and when Valette came up to her with an air of proprietorship and asked her to sing, she thought she had found the explanation. At the sight of her promised husband she realised that her indifference had turned to hate. She rose to oblige him, however, and Mirabeau managed to forestall Valette and turn the leaves of the music for her. The glance he gave her when she finished her song haunted her like a temptation. The heaving of her bosom, the flush on her cheeks, the lowering of her eyes, told Mirabeau what he wished to know. And he felt his own heart beat fast.

The next night in the Marquise de Maliverni's box at the theatre he found the opportunity to tell Emilie that he loved her.

"You have come too late," she sighed, half fainting with joy. "I am already promised."

"I fear no rival but my looks," he murmured.

She glanced up at him and met the passionate gaze of his magnificent eyes. The soul full of intellect and sympathy which beamed from them gave to his scarred face a strange and powerful attraction.

"I have never thought of your looks," she quavered.

He took her hand and pressed it tenderly.

"You are mine, mine, mine!" he whispered; "Valette shall be compelled to withdraw."

The flame with which she burned had ignited that tinder-box of emotions Mirabeau called his heart. He believed that he had found the love he had dreamed of as a boy. She had a sweet voice, her sole accomplishment; his, which he had cultivated at the Abbé Choquard's, was divine. Their mutual passion for music afforded them constant opportunities of meeting. He flung aside his mask and openly courted the heiress. Valette was eaten up with jealousy of a rival who quite eclipsed him in society and the dread of losing a rich wife. He urged the Marquis de Marignane to hurry forward the wedding, and appealed to Madame des Rolands to cabal the Court of Love into driving the Comte de Mirabeau from Aix. Between a sunset and a dawn a blight fell upon Gabriel's popularity. All the men who envied his superiority, all the women whom Emilie had cut out of his affections, seized the chance to revenge themselves. His pedigree was declared to be "yellow," his fortune questioned, his character detracted.

"Tell Madame des Rolands" (whose relations with the Comte de Valbelle were well known), he said, with a *double entente*, when these slanders were reported to him, "that I never attack a lady, least of all one who is justly held in such high esteem as herself. As for M. de la Valette," he added contemptuously, "although he has not even the merit of being yellow, I will do him the honour to spit him on the end of my sword if he cares to meet me."

He boldly demanded Mademoiselle de Marignane's

hand, both of her father and grandmother. The former would readily have considered his proposal, but he had promised his daughter to another—the marriage contract was all but signed.

"I have given my pledge," he said with a grand air, "and a Marignane never breaks his word."

This noble boast did not proceed, however, from a spirit of Provençal chivalry, as the Marquis de Marignane would have liked to make Gabriel believe, but from fear of exciting the hostility of the Court of Love, whereby the pursuit of pleasure, which he made the object of his life, might be inconvenienced. He would listen to no argument, no entreaty. Encouraged by his support, Valette, wisely keeping out of his rival's way, continued to clamour for his wife.

With the Marquise de Maliverni, however, Gabriel had more success. Knowing the old dragon's snobbery, he said to her:

"There can be no comparison between a Mirabeau and a Valette. I have a future in front of me. My father, as you know, has great influence at Court. The Duc de Nivernais is his intimate friend, so is M. de Malesherbes, the Keeper of the Seals. When I am Marquis de Mirabeau I intend to be a King's Minister, in which case my wife will be a *dame du palais*."

The old woman liked him as much as she hated Madame des Rolands, by whom she had discovered that she had been tricked. He had such a subtle way of appealing to her avarice and vanity; moreover, the confident boastfulness with which he spoke carried conviction. What a sweet revenge it would be to supplant the commonplace Valette by the Comte de Mirabeau!

"Everything is all but arranged," she sighed. "The Marquis de Marignane is a fool, but he will never break his promise, and Valette will never let him."

"I will compel him to withdraw at the last moment," said Mirabeau with determination.

"How?" she asked in her falsetto voice. "You are so hot-headed you will create a scandal." And the old harridan fixed her glittering eyes on him as if she would emphasise the impression she wished her words to convey.

"Leave it to me, madame," he replied, understanding her only too well. "I will find the means to persuade Valette to withdraw in my favour."

The day after his interview with the Marquise de Maliverni, the Court of Love learned that Mirabeau had left Aix; his departure was taken as an acknowledgment of defeat. The news that he had gone was conveyed to Mademoiselle de Marignane in a passionate and pathetic letter. But, certain that she was loved, she did not bemoan the fate which destined her for another. On the contrary, she enjoyed the romance of her situation to the full, resolved to be consoled whatever the *dénouement*. In this philosophical mood she was shedding a few romantic tears over the letter before retiring for the night, when Mirabeau appeared in her bedroom.

At the sight of him she uttered a little startled cry in which joy rather than alarm was expressed, and drew around her the folds of the loose *peignoir* she was wearing.

"Emilie!" he cried, springing to her side, and clasping her passionately in his arms he covered her face with kisses.

"How did you come here?" she murmured, when speech returned to her.

"Love, they say, laughs at locksmiths," he replied gaily. "I bribed your maid."

"How clever you are!"

She laughed wickedly, joyously.

"Yes," he said, "I think I have done it cleverly. My carriage is at the door, and Aix, as you know, is inquisitive. To-morrow everybody will know that I was here. Even Valette has something which passes for pride; he will

never marry you after this. You are mine now and for ever, Emilie!"

At this point the girl, who had been admiring his audacity and feeling like the heroine of a romance, suddenly bethought herself of her reputation, and bursting into tears, moaned:

"You have ruined me! Oh why, why have you come?"

"Because I love you, Emilie, and there was no other way to win you. Won't you forgive me, dearest?"

From a situation so fraught with passion virtue seldom escapes. Emilie's was too fragile even to make the effort.

The next day all Aix learned whose was the carriage that had been seen at midnight at the door of the Marquise de Maliverni. When the news of the Comte de Mirabeau's return reached Valette, preferring his own counsel to that which it was probable the Court of Love would force upon him, he quickly left the town.

It was, no doubt, to make sure of enjoying the pleasure he had anticipated at his daughter's wedding, which Valette's disappearance rendered problematical, that the Marquis de Marignane was now induced to lend a ready ear to Mirabeau's proposal. At least the Court of Love were kind enough to put no more malicious construction than this on the marriage they had opposed and at which they had the pleasure of assisting. In Provence everything is forgiven love.

As for the Marquis de Mirabeau, on learning the details of his son's courtship he observed sarcastically to the Bailli:

"I should have sent Count Hurricane to Russia to marry the Empress Catherine. They would have suited one another."

CHAPTER II

DEBT'S CARNIVAL

FROM the day Mirabeau had made his *début* into the world at Saintes, with wings clipped by his father's parsimony, Debt, like a cat scenting prey, had been stealthily stalking him. It had followed him from Saintes to Rhé, from Rhé to Corsica, from Corsica to Paris. Each ruse that he employed to baffle this terrible pursuit had proved of no avail, and at last, fascinated by the fate from which he could not escape, he tumbled between the paws of his enemy.

Debt, however, having got its victim under its claws, instead of devouring him at once, began with feline cruelty to play with him. In Paris he had made the acquaintance of the whole race of usurers. Without money, not even the son of the Friend of Men could carry all before him at Versailles, and never had he needed it more sorely than when he was being petted by duchesses and patted on the back by princes of the blood. His social success at Court, which, while affecting to despise it, had so flattered the Marquis, had been won by the aid of money-lenders. In order to dazzle the Œil de Bœuf, he had been compelled to discount all his wit, all his charm, all his popularity, by means of the promissory note.

His reconciliation with his father had brought him no financial relief. It was, as he had been clearly given to understand, merely a reconciliation on sufferance. The

favour he enjoyed was too slight, too capricious, to stand the strain of an appeal for money. So he had not dared to mention the difficulties with which he was beset, difficulties due less to his extravagance than to his father's meanness; nor had the Marquis mentioned them. In fact, so studiously was the subject of money avoided between them that Mirabeau had even been obliged to borrow the funds to cover the cost of the journey to Provence. On arriving at Aix he had but twenty-five louis on which to win the hand of an heiress already pledged to another!

"It seems," he said to himself dejectedly, when he considered the sum it would be necessary for him to raise in order to fascinate the Court of Love as he had fascinated the Court of Versailles, "as if my father has not only demanded the impossible of me, but purposely placed every obstacle in my way of attempting it."

This situation was, however, not without its advantage; necessity gives to the ambition it rides the pricks that spur it to its goal. Every sou that he raised in Aix served but to make him more desirous, more determined, to please the heiress he had come in quest of.

When he had achieved the impossible, he believed that his financial troubles were over. On the contrary, they had only begun. The announcement in all the gazettes that the eldest son of the Marquis de Mirabeau was about to marry one of the richest heiresses in Provence brought all his unsettled accounts swarming around him.

Alarmed at the amount of his liabilities—which, by reminding him of his dependence at the very moment when he was pluming himself on his success, seemed like a noose in which his whole future was caught, and in which all the hopes born of his contemplated marriage were to be strangled—he felt that now or never was the time to appeal to his father. It had, perhaps, been wise if Mirabeau had yielded to this impulse; never before had he stood so high in his father's esteem, and never again

was the sun of parental favour to shine upon him with so unclouded a lustre. His failure to seize this opportunity and put it to the test was not so much his fault as his misfortune; with such a father it was inevitable that he should hesitate.

In this uncertain mood he consulted a relation, to whom he owed many valuable social services and not a little money. M. de Limaye was a man sufficiently his senior to have acquired a certain amount of common-sense if Nature had previously denied it to him, but experience had failed to sober his character, whose defects, concealed from Mirabeau by their resemblance to his own, accounted to some extent for the intimacy of the two.

"Pooh!" said Limaye, with the cheerful levity that often gives weight to advice because it reassures him who seeks it; "everybody has debts, and creditors were made to lend and to be silenced. Yours know that you will sooner or later succeed your father, that you will inherit a large fortune from your mother, and that you are marrying a rich wife. Money-lenders can wish no better security; your creditors will be content to remind you periodically of what you owe them."

"But fattening on compound interest and usury at my expense, they will eat up my expectations before I ever realise them," argued Mirabeau.

"That entirely depends on how long the day of reckoning is postponed. In that event some other alternative will offer itself. There is always a way, Gabriel, out of a hole."

"I have thought of appealing to my father," said Mirabeau, to whom Limaye's suggestion appeared a rather doubtful expedient. "He is so delighted at my success, judging from the magnificent wedding presents he has sent Emilie, that he might be induced to listen favourably to me. Surely, with such a fortune coming into the family he can afford to be generous."

Limaye shrugged his shoulders.

"You doubt it?" asked Mirabeau anxiously.

"He has been tricked where he hoped to trick," replied the other. "Marignane has not shown himself such a fool in regard to the marriage settlements as your father fancied."

"How do you make that? The contract is worded in such a way that in the event of Marignane's death it is my father, and not I, who will derive the direct benefit of my wife's fortune."

"You forget the allowances in the meantime. Marignane has only agreed to give Emilie three thousand francs a year—one thousand less, by the way, than he promised to allow her had she married Valette—while the Marquis has been inveigled into giving you double this amount. No doubt he is delighted to find himself heir to the rich Marignane estates, but ask him to pay your debts before he inherits—debts which he knows are largely due to his parsimony—and hear what sort of an answer he will give you."

"You are right," sighed Mirabeau. "But tell me how are Emilie and I, in our position, to live on a miserable nine thousand francs a year? And how am I to pay my debts?"

"As to the first question, my Gabriel," said Limaye airily, "the more friendly you are with Marignane the better for you and Emilie. As to the second, you must find fresh creditors; with the security you have to offer them it won't be difficult."

More dangerous advice could not be given to any young man on the eve of his marriage. To one so impulsive, so grandiose as Gabriel, it could not but prove fatal. There was just enough truth in what Limaye said to carry conviction; it gave to the line of least resistance, which is ever tempting, a specious excuse.

In following Limaye's advice, however, he made a feeble attempt to escape from the debt-cat between whose

paws he had fallen. As Provençal custom obliged a bridegroom to give each guest who assisted at his wedding a present, and as the Riqueti pride demanded that such presents should be of a value equal to the importance of its rank, Mirabeau pleaded for a small and quiet wedding. But though this plea was backed by all the arguments of the debtor, it was not heard. Emilie was quite as anxious as her father or her grandmother, both of whom wished to impress the Court of Love, that the ceremony which made her Comtesse de Mirabeau should be magnificent. The expense to which Mirabeau was thus put involved him still further, and, unable to extricate himself, he ceased to struggle.

Debt, however, showed no immediate disposition to despatch him; the cat found its victim too thin, and proceeded to feed him till he was fattened to its satisfaction.

The Comtesse de Mirabeau disliked the country, so it was arranged that the young couple should live in Aix; and in order to enjoy the independence that marriage promises to every one, Mirabeau rented a house for himself and his wife, instead of economising by living either with Emilie's father or grandmother, as they might have done. To maintain this establishment in a gay town like Aix on an income equivalent to four hundred pounds a year was impossible. Nor did Mirabeau make the attempt. Credit, as Limaye had said, was not hard to find. Naturally inclined to extravagance through a love of luxury and splendour, he was driven deeper and deeper into debt by temptation and necessity.

The hopes he had entertained of being able to realise some material benefit from his marriage were speedily dashed, but the illusions in which he had indulged did not vanish with them. The future was pregnant with great expectations, the ease with which he was able to discount them made the raising of money attractive. All his scruples vanished, to borrow became a habit. He felt

himself obliged to make up to his wife for the privations to which their limited income would subject her. He did not count the cost of the style of living he adopted; if he ever reflected on the day of reckoning it was with cynical indifference. After the figure he had cut in Aix before his marriage, especially after the pomp of the wedding, it would have been too humiliating not to continue to live in a manner befitting the rank of a Mirabeau and the fortune of a Marignane. He saw everything with the eyes of careless and inexperienced youth. Independence, so ardently yearned for in his long and bitter bondage, had turned his head.

No one thought of cautioning him ; the Bailli, the only person, perhaps, to whom he would have listened, was absent in Malta. As for Emilie, she was but a spur to her husband's recklessness. Accustomed from infancy to look upon herself as a great heiress, she had no idea of the value of money. Marriage meant to her not only freedom from restraint, but full scope for enjoyment. With a sense of utter irresponsibility, she plunged into all the gaieties of the Court of Love, and encouraged her husband in every folly to which his nimble imagination was attracted. Their revel did not last long; for a year they were as happy as their wedding-bells.

At the hour when life seemed fairest its sun was clouded. Amidst the *Te Deum* with which they celebrated the birth of an heir was heard the knell of doom. To the christening of this new hope, presage of new pleasures, born like the century's on the brink of a precipice, came the evil fairy with its curse. Debt demanded its States General. A creditor, hard pressed, presented his bill for payment; in a fit of exasperation Mirabeau drove him out of the house with blows. The man sought redress in the law. Alarmed at the consequences which an *exposé* of his affairs would be certain to have on his other creditors, Mirabeau once more consulted Limaye, whose advice had already been as

fatal to him as Calonne's was to prove to Louis XVI.

"I must close this fellow's mouth before he brings his action," he said. "Lend me the money to pay his bill, like a good fellow."

But Limaye himself had already advanced him considerable sums which were still unpaid.

"Of course," he said, "I have no intention of making matters worse for you by pressing my own claims; I rely on our intimacy and relationship to give them priority over those of others. I should like to oblige, but there is a limit to my resources."

"But I may be ruined if this bill isn't paid," Gabriel pleaded distractedly. "What am I to do? Give me advice, if nothing else."

"What are your liabilities?"

"Don't ask me, I have not thought of computing them, but this year at Aix has added to them enormously."

"Are you on good terms with Marignane?"

"The best."

"Then appeal to him."

"And if he refuses?"

"Appeal to your mother."

"My mother!" echoed Mirabeau sadly. "Ah, Limaye! would it were in my power to overcome the resentment she bears me. I have written to her, but she refuses to answer my letters. She has declared herself the enemy of all her children who will not come out boldly on her side in her suit against my father. But how could I do this? The last time I took her part—in the terrible quarrel she had with my father on leaving him, and when I alone, of all her children, dared to stand up in her defence against the Pailly, who has been the curse of our family—the last time, I say, when I took her part, my happiness was sacrificed. Not that I should have minded losing it had she manifested the slightest gratitude, the slightest pity for my sufferings. But I had

ceased to be of use to her, and she abandoned me utterly. After five years, during which she had ignored my existence, I met her in Limousin, when the family assembled for the reading of the will of my grandmother, Madame de Vassan. In the meantime I had recovered my father's favour and the right to use my name again, of which I had been deprived. I can never forget the shame I felt whenever I was addressed as Pierre-Buffière. You should have been born a Mirabeau yourself, Limaye, to know how much I hated that name!"

His voice was broken by a sob. After a slight pause he continued agitatedly:

"The reading of Madame de Vassan's will added fresh fuel to the old quarrel between my parents. My father not only claimed my mother's *dot*, to which, of course, he was entitled, but control over all the money my grandmother had bequeathed to my mother. She instituted the law-suit which is not yet settled. I could now be of use to her; she expected me to take her side as before, to forget her cruel neglect. To do so at the moment when I had just recovered my father's favour was out of the question. I begged her to compromise with my father; for answer she threatened to blow out my brains. Yet, I could not have acted otherwise; it is terrible to be placed between two fires. No, Limaye, my mother is out of the question."

"Then," said Limaye, on whom neither this confession nor the evident distress in which it was uttered appeared to produce much effect, "if Marignane refuses to help you, there is nothing left you but to appeal to your father."

"What!" exclaimed Gabriel in despair, as he realised the frailty of the reed on which he leaned, "*you* suggest such an alternative now? It is too late, I have missed my opportunity. Besides, I should never have the courage to appeal to him," he added, as if the thought obsessed him in spite of himself.

"In your position it is not a question of courage, but of necessity," said Limaye with a shrug. "Though the Marquis de Mirabeau will very probably refuse to ruin himself by paying his heir's debts, he will help him to avoid paying them."

"What do you mean?"

"There is such a thing as being *under the hand of the King*," replied Limaye in a tone of mock solemnity.

"Under the hand of the King!" echoed Mirabeau faintly.

"Yes," said Limaye airily; "it is a sort of *lettre de cachet* that snatches him on whom it is served out of the claws of his creditors. To save the honour of the Mirabeaus from being dragged through the mud of law courts and debtor's prisons, the Marquis will readily consent to be of service to his heir by placing him under a nominal arrest."

"But that is to pronounce my ruin!" The words sounded like a groan.

"Say, rather, your salvation," said Limaye, whose cheerful levity at such a moment terrified Mirabeau. "Better be arrested by your father than by your creditors. With your debts the latter might keep you in prison for the rest of your life. But your father, were his heart harder than adamant, must release you sooner or later. Besides, prisons were made to escape from. I told you," he added triumphantly, "that there was always a way out of a hole!"

In despair Mirabeau went to his father-in-law. Though the Marquis de Marignane had a frivolous nature it was not incapable of sympathy; touched by Mirabeau's distress, he consented to silence the dangerous creditor. Moreover, being in a particularly amiable mood, he was induced to offer his son-in-law a sum of sixty thousand livres, on the condition that the Marquis de Mirabeau would guarantee its repayment.

"I would give it to you outright," he said, with a

heartiness which owed all its vehemence to a conviction that this burst of generosity was in no danger of being put to the test, "but my own affairs are not as flourishing as they might be."

He even went to the length of writing a letter to the Marquis de Mirabeau on his son-in-law's behalf. The reply, awaited with what anxiety may be imagined, was received in due course. The Marquis was horrified to hear of his son's debts; he would have been still more so had he been informed of their amount, which, as it was not stated, he believed to be covered by the sum the Marquis de Marignane offered to advance. The bare idea of this loan was of itself sufficient to exasperate him. When he sent his son to Provence to find a wife, it was not only of the continuation of his race that he was thinking, but of the advantage that might accrue to himself from the marriage. Straitened by his "economical" experiments and the expense of his protracted lawsuit with his wife—which was devouring the fortunes of both—he had looked with greedy eyes to Emilie's *dot* to extricate him from his difficulties. But beyond the paltry allowance he made his daughter the Marquis de Marignane, to the vexation of the Marquis de Mirabeau, who, believing him to be a fool, had counted on overreaching him, utterly refused to give Emilie before his death any portion of the fortune that she would ultimately inherit. The Marquis de Mirabeau had, however, managed to insert a clause in the marriage contract by which it was he, and not Mirabeau, who would benefit on the Marquis de Marignane's death. Blinded by his avarice to the folly of waiting for this event, which was likely to be long delayed, and which there was but the smallest possibility that he himself would be alive to witness, he resented the proposed loan as if it were a draft upon himself. The condition, however, which the Marquis de Marignane's own avarice had attached to the loan gave him the power, which he

at once seized, to render it abortive. From Bignon he thundered an angry command to his son "to go immediately to the Château de Mirabeau and study economy."

"It is but the next step to being under the hand of the King," said Emilie discontentedly, when Mirabeau informed her of his difficulties and the necessity of abandoning the pleasures of the Court of Love.

The contrast between the luxurious *ménage* at Aix and the dilapidated Château de Mirabeau was depressing.

Within the old castle decay had reigned for years undisputed by the Bailli, who had been content with the government, so to speak, of the library in which he lived. Even here age had exacted its tribute of dust, cobwebs, and worms. Everywhere age's motto, neglect, was blazoned on crumbling walls and mouldy ceilings, carved on rotting floors, wrought on faded tapestries. Many rooms had never been furnished, others had been dismantled. In the apartments selected for habitation by Mirabeau and his wife the furniture was over a hundred years old. Their bed recalled memories of a great-grandmother who had carried pistols in her girdle.

The aspect without was no less dreary. Perched on a crag against which the angry Durance dashed itself in flood and drought alike; squeezed into a gorge between two mountains of rock; in winter swept by the north wind, in summer baked as if in a furnace by the blazing Provençal sun, this Château d'Ennui was remote, solitary, inaccessible.

The abomination of desolation to Emilie, his ancestral home was, to Mirabeau, a torture chamber. He was even less fitted by temperament for the country than his wife; he needed the mental stimulation of cities, contact with a rushing, eager world. The immense energy of his nature was not latent; activity was to it like a bath

in which its strength was constantly refreshed. His extravagance at Aix could be traced directly to his intense and nervous individuality. He plunged with the same vigour into the fountain of the Court of Love as he was later to plunge into the tempest-tossed ocean of the Revolution. This marvellous activity ran like an electrical current through his whole life, and gave to everything it touched, whether a debt or a vice, love or ambition, an inexhaustible intensity. Could the expenditure of its force have been properly regulated, the time was to come when he might have cleansed the Augean stables of France without deluging them with that flood which, had he lived, must have swept him too away on its tidal wave.

Upon such a man the monotony and stagnation of life in the old castle produced a malarial effect; his energy, poisoned by inactivity, spent itself deliriously. The zeal he at once began to manifest in the working of the estate failed to satisfy his hunger for action, and involved him from the very start in fresh embarrassments.

The Marquis' agent at Mirabeau, in whom both he and the Bailli placed implicit confidence, and whose honesty and devotion to the family neither had ever dreamt of questioning, resented the supervision of this young master, who on the very day of his arrival began to ask embarrassing questions and to interfere in the administration of the estate. The farmers looked on the agent as their natural enemy, but dreading lest the inquisition which should ruin him should also lay bare the illegalities of which they themselves were guilty, they, too, resented the arrival of a new master. So against a common danger the agent and the farmers made a common cause. Like the servants of a certain householder in the biblical parable who had planted a vineyard, the servants of the Marquis de Mirabeau, on the coming of their master's son, said amongst themselves, "Lo, this is the heir; come, let us destroy him, that the inheritance may be ours!"

The method they took to accomplish his destruction was feline. It was known all over Provence that Emilie before leaving Aix had been obliged to pawn her diamonds and Mirabeau to mortgage his income for three years. Aware that ruin haunted the castle, the agents and the farmers guessed that he would try every available means to exorcise the spectre. And they cunningly pretended to help him, knowing that no means of escaping from debt that was suggested to him would seem preposterous; that the more plausible the hope the more surely would he cling to it; that the more enticing it was made the more quickly it would achieve their end.

"It is time the castle was refurnished," said the agent when both the master and mistress exclaimed at the dilapidation of the apartments set apart for their use. "Of course, Madame la Comtesse can never live in such rooms."

"I should think not!" exclaimed Emilie fretfully.

"True, indeed," sighed Mirabeau, "but I should like to know where is the money to come from to pay for their restoration."

"You might cut down the timber on the estate, M. le Comte," said the agent; "*its sale would more than* pay for the wainscoting and regilding which the rooms so sadly need."

A hope flickered in Mirabeau's heart. He went out in search of fuel to feed its flame; naturally his steps turned towards the timbered banks of the Durance, on which the farms and bailiwicks of the marquisate of Mirabeau were situated.

"Ah, Monsieur le Comte," said the farmers, "the river is ruining us. Every year it overflows and damages our crops. If the Durance was dammed, in less than ten years the estate would *more than double its income.*"

"If I had the money I would do it," sighed Gabriel.

"The money is in the timber, monsieur," was the

subtle reply; "it will fetch a big sum and the cleared land will be available for crops."

The flickering flame of hope that the agent lit in Mirabeau's heart was fanned into a blaze by the farmers. Emilie's rooms were redecorated and refurnished; the land was cleared and the Durance dammed; but the timber did not fetch the money expected, and even that which it did fetch Mirabeau was obliged to go to law to collect.

"The cutting down of the timber was wrong, M. le Marquis," wrote the cunning agent to his confiding master at Bignon, "and M. le Comte's lawsuit will absorb the revenue of the estate and ruin the discipline of the tenants. I do not wish to set you against him, M. le Marquis, but he has been selling the furniture and linen in the castle. M. le Comte unfortunately rejects good advice and listens to bad. He suffers himself to be carried away by flattery, to his injury. Everything here is in disorder since his arrival; his creditors are ravenous, and I dread lest any day I shall have to write you that he has been arrested for debt. I have suggested to him that he should urge you to put him under the hand of the King, in Manosque for preference, as then he and Madame la Comtesse would not be deprived of the society of the Chevalier de Gassaud, who is there on a visit to his parents and rides over here every day, rain or shine, to the great satisfaction of Madame la Comtesse and M. le Comte."

If there is such a thing literally as the "angriest" moment of life, it occurred to the Marquis de Mirabeau on reading this letter. There had been occasions in the past, and there were to be others in the future, when his anger had greater justification than the present, but if its intensity may be judged by its effect on his pride, the palm must certainly be given to this outburst. The agent had written there was a danger lest Mirabeau should be seized for debt, and the necessity

of saving the family honour from the intolerable disgrace of seeing the name of Mirabeau dragged into a debtor's prison forced the Marquis to swallow his pride as he had never done before. Whatever satisfaction he might have otherwise obtained from the *lettre de cachet* which his rage demanded from M. de Malesherbes, and to which, it has been said, he considered he had a *right* as a noble, was completely extinguished by the humiliation of beseeching the Court for a warrant placing Gabriel "under the hand of the King."

"M. le Duc," he wrote to Choiseul, the Chief Minister —and, knowing his pride, the depth to which it fell may be imagined—"I know that what I ask is purely a favour, but I trust you will have pity on an unhappy father and deign to come to the help of a family which has always well served its masters."

This appeal, which would have cost another nothing but the effort of penning it, was readily granted to the Friend of Men. But in his mortification the Marquis would rather have heard of his son's death, especially as the succession of his line was secured by the birth of a grandson, than have received the warrant on such terms. The shame it caused him for ever after obscured the sun of favour in which Mirabeau had for so brief a moment basked.

CHAPTER III

MARRIAGE À LA MODE

WHILE the Marquis was forging thunderbolts in Paris, Emilie, all unconsciously, was engaged in a similar occupation at Mirabeau. Of this the Marquis had been informed in the letter he had received from his agent; but the state of mind into which he had been thrown by the news concerning his son caused him to overlook the more shameful implication concerning his son's wife. Nevertheless, by escaping what, for him, should have been the real sting of that waspish letter, he unwittingly provided Emilie with the material for forging her bolt, whereby on its fall he became involved in the destruction it wrought.

Shortly after Mirabeau had taken up his abode at his ancestral home, his father had made the acquaintance in Paris of a young Provençal of attractive person and manners, who held a commission in the King's Mousquetaires. It might have been taken for granted, one would have thought, that such a man as the Marquis de Mirabeau would have been proof against the flattery of a subaltern in a Court regiment. Quite the contrary. He received a most favourable impression of the young *mousquetaire's* character and attainments, and this prepossession extended to the length of furnishing him with a letter of introduction to his son.

"Be sure," he wrote, "to be particularly agreeable to

the Chevalier de Gassaud, who is going to Manosque on a visit to his parents. You will do well to admit him to your confidence and make a friend of him. He is an estimable young man whom the Court and the army have been unable to spoil."

This flattering opinion, which had been largely influenced by Madame de Pailly, to whom the Chevalier de Gassaud had shown those delicate attentions that women whose beauty is on the wane like to receive from young men, was but another instance of the strong personal prejudice that the Marquis permitted to guide him in forming his judgments of people. The Chevalier de Gassaud was, indeed, the very opposite to what the Marquis fancied him to be.

To a young man who had led a wild life in Paris and Versailles, though no wilder, perhaps, than that of the average officer in the King's Mousquetaires, Manosque was a dull place. The fact that he was a cousin of Emilie's would alone, without the Marquis's letter of introduction, have served him, sooner or later, as a sufficient excuse for riding over to the Château de Mirabeau. This, indeed, he lost no time in doing. The reception he got both from Mirabeau and Emilie was extremely cordial ; the latter's welcome was even feverish in its warmth. The delight she felt at the sight of a visitor fresh from the world from which she was banished, and to which her thoughts continually turned longingly, was tinged with a certain anxiety—she dreaded lest he would not return. The *mousquetaire* fancied he detected an *arrière pensée* in her greeting. With time hanging heavily on his hands at Manosque, he was ready to welcome anything that would relieve its tedium. What more agreeable, he thought, than to while away the time till his return to his regiment with a *liaison ?* The idea had no sooner entered his head than it obsessed him with all the force of a temptation.

"Besides," he told himself as he rode back reflectively to Manosque after his visit, "a *liaison* with Emilie will be more full of passion and pleasure than any I have ever known. We were sweethearts in childhood, and though many years have elapsed since those days, I have never forgotten the pang I felt when I learnt of her marriage."

On the following day he returned again to Mirabeau for the express purpose of telling his cousin that he loved her.

In the army love-making, no less than war, is a science, in which young *mousquetaires* are remarkably proficient. The Chevalier de Gassaud had already passed the usual examinations on this subject with distinction when he undertook to transmit his knowledge to Emilie. The seed he had to sow in her heart fell into soil that circumstances had thoroughly prepared to receive it. She had not forgotten the old childhood's flirtation, and the thought of renewing it at the stage where it had been interrupted years before tempted her no less than Gassaud. The idea of deceiving her husband gave her no compunction; she had ceased to love him; he was no more to her now than Valette would have been had she married him. Deception was but the natural sequel to a marriage in which passion had grafted itself on fraud. The disillusion from which it sprung had been mutual. At first, in the crowded gaieties of Aix, neither had had the time to notice the absence of those qualities that each had believed were to be found in the other. But shut up together in a lonely old castle in the country, their total lack of sympathy had immediately become apparent to both.

The first symptom of the cancerous discontent that was consuming Emilie had appeared, however, just before their departure from Aix, when Mirabeau urged her to allow him to raise money on her diamonds.

"You will have no use for them in the country," he

said, "and they will be perfectly safe in pawn. Besides, should you have occasion to wear them I can always redeem them."

Sincerely believing at the time that there *was* a way of extricating himself from his difficulties, and that he would find it, he had further promised her that their residence at the Château de Mirabeau should not last long. It was on this assurance that Emilie had been induced, though most unwillingly, to part with her diamonds. But as Mirabeau's expedients to subject the chaos of his finances to something like order proved abortive, she was compelled not only to abandon all hope of a speedy return to the pleasures of the Court of Love, but to submit to fresh sacrifices, until, with ever-increasing bitterness, she had beheld everything that she valued poured, as it were, into the bottomless pit of her husband's debts.

To help Mirabeau to struggle against adversity she made not the least attempt; on the contrary, she selfishly attributed to him all the misery she was doomed to suffer, and gave vent to her feelings in perpetual and peevish recrimination. Maddening as was the sting of her fretful tongue—to escape from which, as much as to pacify his creditors, he plunged into the feverish activity that involved him in fresh and fatal embarrassments — Gabriel was far from manifesting resentment, of which, indeed, he was ever incapable. Perhaps the natural sweetness of his disposition was never displayed to better advantage than now, when it was daily subjected to the crucial test of domestic trials. His wife's unhappiness filled him with remorse; it hurt him to think that he had dragged her down with him, and, as a sort of compensation to her for the misery he had brought upon her, he patiently endured her reproaches. But the pity which so generously denied her even the satisfaction of quarrelling with him served only to irritate her the more.

Such was the state of affairs when the Chevalier de Gassaud entered their lives. Had he been the most repulsive of men instead of one of the most attractive, an utter stranger instead of a relation, Emilie would have rejoiced at the sight of him. Devoid of all resources within herself and deprived of those of others, bored by an enforced idleness, irritated by petty and sordid cares, she beheld in him her deliverer. In her gladness at her release from solitude *à deux* she regarded him through the rosy atmosphere of romance, in which he was exaggerated out of all proportion to his value.

Her cousin's aristocratic and rather effeminate type of beauty appealed to her; beside him Gabriel, with his short, thick-set, ungainly figure and swarthy, scarred face seemed as ugly as Caliban. With temptation her former illusions concerning a loveless marriage returned, and she recreated in her imagination all the old plans that she had intended to execute had she married Valette. It never occurred to her to resist Gassaud's advances; like most women of her century, she regarded a *liaison* as the supreme prerogative of her sex. In the Court of Love an amour was only called by the coarse and brutal name of adultery when it created a scandal. Consequently, on the first signal from the *mousquetaire* she rushed into his arms.

To deceive Gabriel, difficult as it might have seemed, was really quite easy. He had welcomed the Chevalier de Gassaud no less eagerly than Emilie. With his usual impulsive impetuosity he impounded, so to speak, into a close intimacy one who would otherwise have remained a mere acquaintance. Gassaud became the receptacle of all his troubles—troubles with his creditors, troubles with his father, troubles with his wife; and so great was his personal magnetism that the man who betrayed him fell also under his spell. Had Gassaud been obliged to affect a sympathy he did not feel, Mirabeau would have detected the intrigue at once; but the *mousquetaire's*

liking for the husband of his mistress was sincere, and he was fond of passing as much time in the company of one as of the other. Thus Mirabeau himself provided the screen behind which his wife and his friend made him a cuckold!

The situation, however, was not without its revenge. The Chevalier de Gassaud was far from enjoying the pleasure he had anticipated from this *liaison*. His character was less vicious than shallow; had he thought twice before testing the apples of sin he would have refused many of them, for he was one of those to whom the contemplation of a temptation affords greater pleasure than its consummation. He possessed, in a word, that negative virtue—a troublesome conscience; his sense of guilt brought with it a terrible fear of detection. But the bond that united him to Emilie was not easily snapped. More infatuated, more courageous than Gassaud, she was not willing to give up her lover and relapse once more into the stifling monotony, the well-nigh solitary confinement, from which at least he had released her.

"If you desert me now," she threatened when Gassaud suggested that for their greater safety he should visit the Château de Mirabeau less frequently, "I will confess everything to Gabriel; anything would be preferable to what I endured in this place before you came into my life."

From such a mistress it seemed to the unhappy *mousquetaire* that anything was to be apprehended. His desire to get out of his *liaison* now became as keen as it had been to get into it. To make exit as graceful as necessity demanded required cunning. In this the Chevalier de Gassaud was not lacking. To Mirabeau he said:

"The only way to escape from your difficulties is to get your father to put you under the hand of the King."

To Emilie he added:

"It is the only means by which you can effect a return to Aix. When Gabriel is under the hand of the King he will be able to live anywhere he pleases, and it will not be the Château de Mirabeau, you may depend, that he will choose."

In spite, however, of the magnitude of his troubles, to which even the danger of arrest for debt was added, Mirabeau was not easily to be persuaded to accept relief that he regarded as humiliating; and his consent, when eventually wrung from him, was far from accomplishing what either Emilie or the Chevalier de Gassaud had expected.

On the day that the Marquis's thunderbolt fell without any previous warning on the Château de Mirabeau, Emilie had been obliged to part with two insignificant bracelets, the last that remained of her once splendid store of jewels.

"Is this the happiness you promised me?" she moaned, as she unbuckled the ornaments from her arms and gave them to her husband to hand over to the pawnbroker. "Was it not enough to shut me up in this dismal castle, to cut me off from all my friends and enjoyments, but you must strip me of the very presents I received at my wedding?"

"I have done my best, Emilie," protested Mirabeau with his wonted gentleness, "to make the place habitable. I have had your rooms redecorated and refurnished at a cost which has far exceeded the estimates."

"And to pay for it," she retorted, stung by the mildness of a reproach which she knew she deserved, "I suppose you will ask me to pawn the very clothes off my back! Not a day passes but some new bill is presented. The servants are unpaid. The butcher and baker refuse to give us credit. In order that we may have food I have been obliged to borrow from the curé."

"And I," groaned Mirabeau, covering his face with his

hands, "have even been obliged to borrow from the workmen on the estate!"

Emilie laughed scornfully.

"At any rate," said Mirabeau, with a sudden forced cheerfulness, "this state of things cannot last for ever; the day will surely come when we shall both inherit fortunes." And hope, pale as a ray of November sunshine struggling through a fog, flickered on his haggard face.

"You make me feel like a murderess!" she exclaimed, recoiling from him in horror as he paced the room agitatedly. "I do not wish my father to die." And she burst into tears.

"Oh, Emilie, Emilie," he said bitterly, "surely you know that I do not wish your father's death! Don't let us make life drearier than it is by wilfully misunderstanding one another."

"I have no wish to quarrel," she rejoined acidly; "I am not of a quarrelsome nature."

"Of course you are not. Come, let us try to face adversity bravely; united we can still coax back happiness. At any rate our voices can't be pawned. We haven't sung together for a long time, and I am sure a duet would do us both good. Let us try the 'Folies d'Espagne,' that song we used to sing when I was trying to win you from Valette. Say, shall we?"

Thinking to make the olive-branch he offered her more acceptable, he gave to his words a light, jesting intonation; but the allusion to her voice was unfortunate—it reminded her of vanished triumphs.

"Valette!" she echoed peevishly; "perhaps I might have been happy had I married him."

"That is cruel, Emilie," he remonstrated plaintively.

"Cruel? you call me cruel?" she returned, raising her voice to a shrill pitch. "If I am cruel, it is you who have made me so; you have ruined my life, blighted my hopes, cheated me of the happiness I looked to marriage

to bring me. Why, I was far happier when I lived with my grandmother, who scolded me from morning till night. In those days, at least, I had something to look forward to. You assured me when you took me away from Aix that it would only be for a short time. Say, how much longer is this exile to last?"

At this moment a door behind them opened, and the Chevalier de Gassaud entered the room. He was spattered with the mud of the roads over which he had ridden from Manosque, but these marks of travel did not detract from his general appearance, which was fresh, animated, and prepossessing. Both Emilie and Mirabeau gave a sigh of relief at the sight of him, and the former, uttering a little cry of pleasure, extended to him her hand, on which, as he bent over it, his lips lingered rather longer than etiquette demanded. He noticed that something was amiss, and turned, without relinquishing Emilie's hand, towards Gabriel, who had flung himself wearily into a chair.

"What, more bills, more duns?" he said gaily. "What's up? You look as if the skies were about to fall."

"Oh!" sighed Mirabeau, "Emilie is eating out her heart in this place, and things are in the worst possible mess. We haven't a louis between us, and I don't know where to find another."

"You *do* know where to find relief from this horrible existence," cried Emilie fretfully, "and if you were sincere in wishing to 'coax back our happiness,' as you are so fond of repeating, you would not hesitate to appeal to your father to be put under the hand of the King. It is the only way to save us from absolute want, and you know it."

"Oh, Emilie, think of the shame of it," he said.

She had turned her back on him impatiently, but on his remonstrance she swung herself round again and retorted mockingly:

"You would try the patience of a saint with your shame. Is it a greater shame to be saved from imprisonment than to be imprisoned? And when you are in prison for debt, what is to become of me and your child, I should like to know! Oh, but, of course, *my* shame is nothing to you; but I will waive that. It is not a question of shame now, but of the bare necessities of life. Do you mean to say that you would rather we literally starved than that you would beg to be put under the hand of the King, as many another of quite as good a family as yours is only too glad to do? Oh, he is enough to drive one mad!" she added, with a stamp of the foot, turning towards Gassaud.

The *mousquetaire* was eager to seize the opportunity the quarrel gave him; but the anxiety he displayed in his attempt to make peace must have betrayed his ulterior motive if Mirabeau had been less agitated.

"Why don't you take Emilie's advice," he said; "why will you persist in letting pride prevent you from obtaining domestic contentment and release from your creditors? What is pride? It is the most ridiculous emotion in the world—pride. It is the fly in the ointment of life, mere silly self-consciousness in the face of an imaginary public. Do you suppose that the world on account of which we feel pride cares the least whether we are proud or not? Our neighbour's pride may be every whit as great as ours, but what is it to us? If we think of it at all, is it not with a sort of sneer? It seems to me that other people's pride always appears to ourselves like presumption. Those who care little for their pride are invariably the happiest. You have too great a sense of humour to take yourself so seriously. Be sensible, Gabriel; ignore pride—rise above it and be happy."

Two months before the same arguments in the mouth of a Limaye would have failed to convince Mirabeau, but now, falling from the lips of a Gassaud, they seemed

unanswerable. Circumstances had been gradually bringing him to the point of recognising the necessity of yielding to the inevitable, and familiarity with humiliation had at length rendered him callous to it.

"Well," he said, "have your way; I will write to my father and beseech him to place me under the hand of the King."

He heaved a sigh of relief; in submitting to the formality he had dreaded, he even began to desire it. Reason, like morality, has more than one point of view, and in order to carry conviction is ever ready with a plausible excuse.

With his customary impetuosity, he at once sat down to write to his father, but in the very act the agent of the estate was announced.

"M. le Comte," he said, without any preamble, "the Bailli of Manosque is below in the court-yard; he has begged me to hand you this letter."

With a presentiment of misfortune Mirabeau tore it open, and having read the contents at a glance, sank back with a groan into the chair from which he had risen.

"What is it?" cried Emilie and Gassaud in one voice, as they ran to him.

"There is no need for me to write to my father," he laughed hysterically, tearing up the letter he had written; "he has, of his own accord, placed me under the hand of the King."

"But the Bailli of Manosque," cried Emilie, "what has this got to do with him?"

"Yes," echoed Gassaud, "how does it concern the Bailli?"

Mirabeau seized Gassaud by the hand.

"My friend," he said, "you will be saved the trouble of riding over here every day to comfort Emilie and me. My father has not only placed me under the hand of the King, but has also procured a *lettre de cachet* fixing

Manosque as my place of detention; I am to go there at once."

"A *lettre de cachet!*" shrieked Emilie.

"Manosque!" murmured Gassaud. And all the hopes he had built of escaping from his dangerous *liaison* by persuading Mirabeau to place himself under the hand of the King tumbled like a house of cards.

CHAPTER IV

VENGEANCE À LA MIRABEAU—PREMEDITATED

RENDERED craven by a guilty conscience, there was no longer any doubt in the Chevalier de Gassaud's mind but that his relations with the Comte and Comtesse de Mirabeau were doomed to some fatal *dénouement.* In the long arm of coincidence which retribution had employed, as it so often does, to accomplish its end, he had recognised the hand of an avenging destiny. He lived in perpetual terror of detection and a deadly vengeance. With that quick, impulsive nature of his, what might not Mirabeau be expected to do should he discover that the friend to whom he had bared his heart had betrayed his honour!

Never was *liaison* more bitterly repented than this to which Gassaud was now the unwilling slave. In Manosque, living within a stone's-throw of the Mirabeaus, it was inevitable that his intimacy with them should become all the closer. To relax the bonds that bound him to Mirabeau and Emilie was impossible without exciting the suspicion of the former and the animosity of the latter.

"Your friendship," said Mirabeau to him, "is the one bright spot in our cloud of misfortunes. I don't know what Emilie and I shall do when you are obliged to return to your regiment."

"Ah," thought the *mousquetaire,* whose vanity rather than viciousness had led him into a situation in

which cowardice would be contemptible and bravery scarcely a virtue, "what wouldn't I give to be back in Versailles!"

But to leave Manosque, much as he desired, which was the only possible means of severing a connection that had destroyed his peace of mind and seemed to threaten his life, was out of the question. Had his departure depended on his parents, for the special purpose of visiting whom after an absence of some years he had come to so dull a place, he could easily have invented an excuse for leaving the town before the expiration of his furlough. But there was another consideration of the greatest importance to him that prevented either a pusillanimous flight or a discreet departure.

On his arrival in Manosque his parents had, with his concurrence, entered into negotiations with a certain Marquis de Tourette with the object of securing the hand of his daughter for their son. This marriage would be most advantageous to Gassaud, for Mademoiselle de Tourette was not only rich but closely related to the Villeneuves, the most powerful family in Provence, one that, as the Marquis de Mirabeau would scornfully have said, had *enversaillé* itself and was consequently possessed of the Court influence so necessary to the advancement of an ambitious and penniless *mousquetaire.* In his intense anxiety to be separated from the fatal Mirabeaus, a visit to the Château de Tourette, which was sixty miles distant from Manosque, should have offered under the circumstances, one would think, a plausible excuse for his departure. But even this means of escape was cut off by an inflexible custom of the province, which forbade a suitor to visit the family of the lady he sought in marriage till his suit had been accepted by her parents or guardians, and this stage the Gassaud–Tourette negotiations had not yet quite reached.

The desire to form this brilliant alliance balanced the dread of Mirabeau's vengeance in the Chevalier de Gas-

saud's mind. But in tying him to Manosque it served to increase his fear. He was fully alive to the force of the convention of morals by which public opinion in his country and century was influenced. He felt quite certain that whatever form Mirabeau's vengeance would take its concealment would be impossible; even should he have the luck to escape with his life from the anger of the husband he had wronged, he would be covered with scandal of a kind that must inevitably ruin his suit for the hand of Mademoiselle de Tourette. He had every reason to believe that her father would take the view usually held of a man who had been publicly branded as an adulterer, and refuse to one guilty of the unpardonable crime of a scandalous intrigue what he might readily be induced to yield to one merely guilty of the venial sin of a properly regulated and approved amour. To the Chevalier de Gassaud, then, not only the safety of the present but all that he desired of the future depended on the secrecy of his *liaison* with the Comtesse de Mirabeau.

The thought of exposure, on the contrary, did not seriously alarm Emilie. It is true she felt the influence of her lover's fears, but they were transmitted to her in a lesser degree and produced on her a different effect. Gassaud's extreme precaution to avoid attracting suspicion filled her with a vague uneasiness that was not without a certain charm. Like a moth hovering around a flame, while realising the possibility of being burnt by the fire with which she played, she courted danger. Her flighty imagination cast over the situation a sort of poetical glamour that made her appear to herself like the heroine of a romance. The artifices she adopted to escape immolation, so to speak, on the altar of her amour possessed an element of the excitement she craved, which broke the monotony of her life and lightened the burden of the petty vexations to which poverty and exile subjected her.

Apart from this, Manosque was even more dreary to

Emilie than the Château de Mirabeau. The pleasures she had tasted during the first year of her marriage at Aix were branded upon her memory in fire. Having proved their existence, they were to her no longer a dream but an elusive reality, as tantalising as fruit hanging out of reach to a child. Though life at Manosque was totally unlike that at Aix, there was, nevertheless, something about the place and its surroundings which seemed to invite a comparison, exceedingly to the disadvantage of the former. There were sufficient people to form a society, but the inhabitants of Manosque contained amongst them no spirit enterprising enough to organise a Court of Love. In the numerous *châteaux* in the neighbourhood everybody seemed to have fallen asleep, but if pleasure was a feature of their dreams it was coarse and bucolic. As to situation, which contributes so greatly to the pleasures of the senses, Manosque rivalled the beauty of the ancient capital of the province : the Alps were nearer and grander, and even the wild Durance had consented to take the bit. Saddled by an ornate bridge, and richly caparisoned by grassy dykes and wooded banks, it pranced past the picturesque town, so to speak, like a thoroughbred broken to harness. Thus with the promise of pleasure, as it were, ever on its lips, a promise it never attempted to fulfil, Manosque possessed for Emilie's frivolous nature all the elements of irritation. To her it was a sort of dead-and-alive Aix, and she hated it as much for the memory of desires it evoked but to baffle as for its own provincial dulness.

Having discovered, as she did at once, that life at Manosque was quite as dreary as at the Château de Mirabeau, the society of her young and handsome cousin became more than ever necessary to her. But though the expectation of detection in which they both lived provided her with excitement, Gassaud's fears and their depressing effect on his spirits robbed the *liaison* of the pleasure she had anticipated from it. His pusillanimity

had stripped her hero of his halo, but she still fancied she loved him because she had need of his company. He was in reality nothing more to her than somebody she had stumbled upon in the dark labyrinth of solitude, and with whom, for sake of companionship, she was proceeding in search of the exit. Another, had she met him, would have served her purpose equally well.

Gassaud, in whom fear had rendered comprehension extremely sensitive, was quick to understand Emilie's feelings in regard to him. He believed that in them lay the principal source of his danger, and in his intense anxiety to avoid it he tried to inspire his mistress with his own craven fear by reminding her of the consequences of exposure in letters which, though he saw her daily, he was in the habit of sending her two or three times a day as well. But Emilie, however indifferent she might have been at bottom to detection, of which, as far as she personally was concerned, she had little real fear, had no intention of betraying her *liaison* and thereby losing the only excitement that coloured her life. Gassaud's excessive care was, therefore, not only unnecessary, but actually brought about the very catastrophe it was meant to avert. For one day, one of these letters by some mischance was enclosed in an envelope addressed to the Marquis de Tourette. His action was prompt and decisive. He sent the letter intended for Emilie to her husband and wrote to Gassaud's parents breaking off the negotiations for the marriage of his daughter, which were all but settled.

The *mousquetaire* received the latter of these dreaded blows first. It made the fear of the other the more terrible, the more imminent. The consciousness that it had not yet fallen possessed him while he read the Marquis de Tourette's staggering letter. Stalked, as he firmly believed, by a deadly vengeance, his life seemed to pant in him for life. The thought of escape dashed itself madly against the reeling walls of his brain. Suddenly a chink of light filtered through the dizzy darkness and

hope battled frantically with despair. With a shaky hand he scrawled the following hurried lines to Emilie, and bade a servant bear them to her on the wind:

"By some horrible fatality I have sent a letter intended for you to the Marquis de Tourette. He has broken off the negotiations for my marriage. Detection is inevitable. If Gabriel does not yet know, come, if possible, at once.—G."

"There is just a possibility that the Marquis de Tourette has not informed Mirabeau," he said to his parents, who, until now ignorant of the *liaison*, were scarcely less agitated than himself. "In this case I shall have time to flee, otherwise I can never get out of the town. He has the eyes of Argus."

He kept repeating this with a sort of frenzied monotony. There was no calming him; the fear of death was upon him.

In the midst of this torturing suspense Emilie arrived. She was *en déshabillé;* her hair, unpowdered and undressed, hung loose on her shoulders, over which she had thrown a cloak that completely enveloped her figure. In the middle of her cheeks, in which there was seldom any colour, there burned two vivid scarlet spots as round and as large as a louis. They were the only sign she showed of excitement. She was panting slightly, but it was from the speed with which she had come; if she felt any fear it vanished at the sight of Gassaud's.

As she crossed the threshold the cloak she wore fell from her shoulders, revealing a very elegant *peignoir*, whose clinging drapery proclaimed that she was *enceinte*. To the *mousquetaire*, reminded thus suddenly and at such a moment of the condition of his mistress, it was as if the ghost of his guilt, calling for vengeance, had risen before his affrighted conscience, causing his heart to throb as if it would beat down the walls that imprisoned it.

"Has he heard yet? What is he going to do? Where is he now?" he asked in a voice thick with fear.

His agitation filled her with loathing; for the first time she realised what a coward her hero was.

"If he has heard," said Emilie contemptuously, "he has not told me. What is he going to do? Challenge you, I suppose. You had better choose pistols. He is an expert with the sword. Where is he? Well, that I cannot tell you with certainty, but judging from the hour I should say he was at work as usual on his *Essay on Despotism*, of which he talks so much. Have you any more questions on which you wish information?" And she stooped to pick up the cloak that had fallen from her shoulders, an act which in their excitement none of the others offered to perform for her.

Gassaud relapsed into silence, meditating a plan of action, a mode of flight.

"Oh, Comtesse," quavered his mother, wringing her hands, "I could not have believed it possible. I never had the least suspicion that things were not as they should be between you."

"No," said her husband sternly, addressing his son; "if I had had the least suspicion I should have insisted on your leaving Manosque."

Emilie began to laugh. A desire to torture these people seized her. "To think it was *you* who should let the cat out of the bag!" she cried, casting on the *mousquetaire* a look that made him quail. "Oh, là, là, it is very funny!"

"If I gallop I could reach Lyons to-morrow," said Gassaud as if speaking to himself, "but there is no time to lose."

"So you would desert me then?" cried Emilie.

In the words, uttered in a tone of feigned despair, a threat was veiled. Gassaud realised that his escape from Manosque lay in the hollow of her hand.

"Of course, you are to go with me," he said soothingly, intending the while, if she accompanied him, to abandon her on the highway. "Surely you do not think that I would leave you behind?"

The ruse did not deceive Emilie, but she pretended to be taken in by it in order that his craven spirit might deliver itself the more completely into her power.

"No," she replied, swallowing the scorn that was choking her, "I am sure you will not leave me behind. But I prefer to remain here. It will be pleasanter than being chased about the country by an infuriated husband."

Her apparent unconcern relieved Gassaud's parents; perhaps, they thought, the situation might after all be explained to the satisfaction of the Comte de Mirabeau. But the fears of the *mousquetaire* were not to be abated by any such delusion.

"Our only danger," he said anxiously, "is in getting out of the town. Once we are clear of the town he cannot follow us. His *lettre de cachet* forbids him to leave Manosque."

"But think of the pleasure I should miss," she returned with a mockery she could not hide.

"Pleasure?" he echoed in amazement.

"Yes. I do not wish to miss your duel with Gabriel Of course there must be a duel. It will be reported in the *Mercure*, and give them something to talk about at Aix." And Emilie burst into laughter.

Gassaud turned deathly pale. He understood that she intended to prevent his flight.

"To think it was for such a heartless creature as you," he groaned, "that I have lost the chance of marrying Mademoiselle de Tourette!" And he turned despairingly to his parents, who in their turn appealed to Emilie.

"Aren't you afraid of your husband?" put in Madame de Gassaud faintly.

"It is possible that he may do you some fatal injury," added her husband, who, knowing Mirabeau's impetuous temper, now saw in flight the only safety for his son.

But Emilie paid no heed to them. Angered by Gassaud's cowardly plaint, she cried tantalisingly :

"Well, *I* didn't put an incriminating letter into an envelope addressed to the Marquis de Tourette."

Stung by the taunt, the distracted *mousquetaire* replied with another, and neither any longer having occasion to keep in check the mutual animosity that the *liaison* had for months past been secretly engendering from the fears of the one and the disillusion of the other, they both blazed into an open quarrel. In vain did M. and Madame de Gassaud endeavour to pacify them, pleading the urgent necessity of devising, if possible, some plausible means of satisfying Mirabeau of their innocence. But Emilie's taunts were not to be silenced and not to be endured, and in the midst of the shrill confusion of four people speaking at once, Mirabeau himself arrived on the scene.

At once a profound hush fell upon the room. It was evident at a glance that he was aware of the deception of which he had been so long the victim. In his hand he carried Gassaud's letter to Emilie which had been sent to him by the Marquis de Tourette.

"So you are here," he said, looking at his wife; "it is as well." Then turning to Gassaud, who was leaning for support against a table, he added, raising the hand in which he held the letter, "This, then, is the way you repay my confidence? Great God, what a wretch you are! Hospitality, trust, friendship, it seems, are nothing to you. Why did you not find the courage to kill me? You knew that to a man of my nature betrayal was a thousand times worse than death."

He spoke very quietly, in a tone in which he might have uttered a commonplace. His dark face was pale, even its purple scars had faded; they seemed like stains that might be washed off. His eyes alone indicated the fierce agitation that was chained up within him. They fascinated Gassaud, and compelled him to meet their restless, glittering gaze.

"Did you imagine," he went on in the same quiet, even

manner, which by its striking contrast with the passionate significance of his words inspired the *mousquetaire* with an ever-increasing dread, "that your cowardly hypocrisy, your false faith, all the ruses of your infernal soul to deceive me, could escape my observation? Did you take me for a fool, did you think I was blind? More than once I have been tempted to spit you to the wall on the point of my sword. But the very thought of suspecting your friendship of a treason of which I had no absolute proof seemed to me like a crime. You might have continued indefinitely to sacrifice virtue and honour to a brutal desire, had not destiny determined to avenge me. For the accident by which your perfidy is proved to me is so incredible that it seems only capable of explanation by describing it as a decree of destiny. It is as if Providence itself handed you over to justice and demanded your punishment. You thought, no doubt, that in the day of reckoning my outraged honour would demand redress from you after the customary fashion, and that a duel might enable you to escape my wrath by perpetrating another injury, fatal, perhaps, to me. But it is my duty to punish you, not to give you satisfaction. If my sword leaves its scabbard it can only be to slay you in cold blood."

The studied calmness with which Mirabeau pronounced this rhetorical denunciation was very impressive. It resembled the fascinating indifference of a python which, awakened from coma by the advent of a live animal thrust into its cage, raises its head as if to say, "So you are my meal; well, I will eat you when I am ready," and then relapses into its coils. If Gassaud had entertained the faintest hope of escape when Mirabeau began to address him, it was blighted before he finished. Torn with terror and remorse, he awaited, without the power of speech, the death he fully expected.

But not so his parents. Madame de Gassaud fell on her knees at Mirabeau's feet and piteously besought him to spare her son's life. The father was more dignified, more cunning, in his appeal for mercy.

"If you take his life from him," he said, standing in front of his son, "it would be but what he deserves. Nevertheless, he is my only child, and, as a noble, you know what that means to a noble. You must kill me first : I could never endure the shame of having my race extinguished. I am too old to beget another heir."

"How you have misunderstood me!" said Mirabeau with cold disdain. "I have too much respect for you, M. de Gassaud, to wring your heart by murdering the craven wretch of whom you have the misfortune to be the father. I have no intention of publishing my disgrace by shedding his blood." And he gently raised old Madame de Gassaud, who was covering his hands with kisses.

With a cry the *mousquetaire* flung himself at Mirabeau's feet and passionately implored his forgiveness. His gratitude and remorse were sincere, but to Mirabeau they appeared even more revolting than his terror.

"If your conscience were not the sink of all the vices it should be your executioner," he said contemptuously ; and disengaging his legs with a gesture of disgust from the fellow's cringing embrace, he turned to his wife, who had been a silent spectator of the scene.

She trembled when she met his eyes, but it was from excitement. She was not afraid of him ; his denunciation of Gassaud had failed to impress her, and the forgiveness with which it had ended seemed to her scarcely less craven than the *mousquetaire's* abject behaviour. Remembering the gentle and patient manner in which he had always borne her constant and bitter reproaches, she believed him wholly lacking in spirit, and was prepared to throw on him all the blame of

her *liaison*, as she had thrown that of their debts, exile, and wretchedness.

Perhaps he understood what was passing in her mind from the curl of her lips and the bold defiance of her eyes; perhaps his gentleness and patience were exhausted. His manner suddenly changed; it was still composed, but it was the composure of a masterful man who inspires a sense of strength and authority against which resistance is powerless.

"Who gave you, Emilie," he said, "the right to deprive me of the joy of being the father of my wife's child?" [1] And his glance rested for an instant significantly on her figure. "Who told you that for practising such a deception on me I should not plunge a dagger into your heart?"

For the first time Emilie felt frightened, and with a look of terror drew back from her husband. Madame de Gassaud uttered a shriek and fell in a faint, but nobody paid any attention to her. M. de Gassaud rushed between the husband and wife. The *mousquetaire* said never a word.

Mirabeau brushed the old man aside roughly with a short laugh of contempt.

"You have no need to be frightened, Emilie," he said. "I shall not kill you, though you have done me the greatest injury a wife can do to a man. I pity you. I am ready to make every excuse for you. I remember the bad examples that you have had before your eyes all your life in your mother and grandmother. Knowing this, I should have guarded you against temptation, even though it has taken so contemptible a shape as your seducer. Instead, I have by my own example robbed you of the little religion you had when I married you. No, it is I who am to blame, and I will devote the

[1] The child to which Mirabeau referred was born dead a few months later.

rest of my life to make you forget your fault. From me you have nothing to fear."

The lofty magnanimity of this rebuke, no less scathing than the denunciation of Gassaud, filled Emilie with mortification and dread. The sceptre she had wielded was suddenly wrested from her; recrimination was henceforth impossible, discontent voiceless. Manosque had become a prison of which her husband was the jailer. Utterly crushed, she broke down and wept bitterly.

To Mirabeau the sight of her grief was an evidence of contrition; he believed that he had touched her heart, whereas he had but wounded her pride. The tendency inherent in all the Riquetis to be theatrical and grandiose, to strike the imagination, to pose, had urged him to give to his revenge an impressive originality. From vanity rather than true nobility, from indifference rather than pity, he had studied the *rôle* he had played. Influenced, insensibly perhaps, by the reading of the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, which had flooded France with sentimentalism, he had acted like a character worthy of Rousseau. As he glanced around the room and beheld the astonishment on the faces of the Gassauds, the remorse on that of the Chevalier, and the tears of his wife, the generosity he had displayed elated him. Carried away by the sublimity of his feelings, he became unconsciously sincere, and suddenly conceived the idea of crowning his high-flown vengeance with an action that out-Rousseaued Rousseau, and in its spontaneity, surprise, and chivalry was eminently characteristic of the man.

"And now," he said, in a manner that might be compared to the peroration of his rhetorical denunciation of Gassaud and rebuke of his wife, and he glanced from one to the other in speaking, "as I fear that the reputation of my wife, the mother of my son, may suffer, should this scandal become known, I am going to the Marquis de Tourette to implore him to renew the negotiations for

the marriage of his daughter that he has broken off!" And having launched this thunderbolt on the amazed Gassauds, he rushed from the room.

Half an hour later, notwithstanding the King's order forbidding him to leave Manosque, he was riding to the Château de Tourette, sixty miles distant at the other end of Provence.

CHAPTER V

VENGEANCE À LA MIRABEAU—UNPREMEDITATED

THE burst of generosity, worthy of a Gascon, with which Mirabeau had put the *panache*, so to speak, to his revenge, was not without guile. In spite of his lofty and impassioned rhetoric, he had not really felt injured by the deception of which he had been the victim ; at the most it was but a flesh-wound. He did not love his wife ; nor, for all his confidences, was his attachment to Gassaud as profound as his ardent and emotional manner had led that unhappy *mousquetaire* to suppose. His pardon was premeditated : it had been prompted by self-interest rather than by chivalry. He desired above everything to prevent this affair from reaching the ears of his father, whose anger against him he was sure would only be increased by such a scandal.

But Mirabeau was mistaken if he thought that he had but to plead the innocence of his wife's relations with the Chevalier de Gassaud in order to persuade the Marquis de Tourette to reopen the negotiations for the marriage of his daughter with the latter. He found that, quite apart from Gassaud's misconduct, this match was not at all to the taste of the lord of Tourette. This gentleman, by reason of his relation to the great Villeneuve family, looked upon that of Gassaud, which was of the *petite noblesse*, with scorn. In his colossal provincial pride he would have believed he was conferring a favour even if

it had been a question of marrying his daughter to a Mirabeau. It was, indeed, only to please her, for in spite of her *dot* and her Villeneuve connections she had begun to dread that she was destined to an eternal spinsterhood, that the Marquis de Tourette had condescended to bargain with the Gassauds at all. As it was, he had done all he could to hamper the negotiations, and chance having given him a plausible excuse for breaking them off altogether, he was in no mood to listen to Mirabeau's proposal.

The latter, however, was not the man to court danger, as he had done in leaving Manosque without permission, to no purpose. He flung into the cause of the *mousquetaire*—which was his own—all his eloquence, all his magnetism ; and it was only by imploring, commanding, and even threatening the astonished father, who was attacked with equal vehemence by his daughter, that the Marquis de Tourette was finally bullied or enticed into yielding.

Having accomplished his purpose, Mirabeau at once proceeded to return to Manosque. Risky as his departure had been, had he returned as clandestinely as he had gone he might have derived all the benefit he anticipated from one of the most original actions he ever performed. Unfortunately, he remembered that he had a sister living at Grasse to whom he was very much attached.

"It would be a pity," he said to himself as he rode away from the Château de Tourette, "when I am in the neighbourhood not to pay her a visit. A delay of twenty-four hours more can make no difference."

So he turned his horse aside and rode towards Grasse, and an adventure that was to bring his married life to an astonishing climax.

Riqueti to the core, the youngest daughter of the Marquis de Mirabeau was a worthy descendant of that ancestress who had "carried a pistol in her girdle, and used it when necessary." Impetuous and theatrical, like

all her race, she had a character not often found among her sex. In writing of her when the fatal ascendancy that she had acquired over him had given place to aversion, Mirabeau thus described her :

"With all the *éclat* of the most brilliant youth and health, Louise had glorious black eyes, the freshness of Hebe, and that noble air which one associates with the women of antiquity. Her figure possessed the rarest grace, and she had a wonderful charm of manner. To these seductive attractions was added a romantic imagination, but her heart was cold, and she was utterly devoid of the moral sense. It was only through her vanity that she was susceptible to generosity, through her illusions to love, and through her obstinacy to constancy. At twenty, when our attachment was deep, Louise was utterly unscrupulous, and though she took no pains to conceal this defect, there was no man of sense and honour who, falling in love with her, but must have lost both."

The blemishes that marred this vivid portrait of his sister were due, perhaps, even less to the natural perversity of her character than to her environment. A mere child when Madame de Pailly had taken her mother's place at Bignon, Louise de Mirabeau had suffered the most of all the Marquis' children from the loss of a home, even though it were one so unlikely to provide a wholesome influence as hers had been. The Dominican convent at Montargis where she, like her sisters, had been brought up had been chosen by her father because of its reputation for discipline. But the strictness of the convent was a myth, and its regulations, like those of many similar institutions before the Revolution, were based on those which governed the famous Abbaye de Thélème, where the Rabelaisian Friar John provided "a succession of elegant recreations according to the pleasure of the inmates."

"What was charming about my convent," said Louise

to her brother once, when comparing her childhood with his, "was that it was not at all religious."

Kept here at the instigation of Madame de Pailly till she was seventeen, during the ten most impressionable years of her life, she was only permitted to return to Bignon in order to be married. But the Marquis, to whom she had grown up an utter stranger, captivated by her dazzling beauty and deceived by the cunning of her deportment, made no haste to find her a husband. The mistress, however, who dominated him, fearing an influence that her quick perception told her she had just cause to dread, had not permitted the quest to lag long.

"You seem to be having some difficulty, Merlou, in finding a husband for Louise!" she said one day shortly after Mademoiselle de Mirabeau's return from Montargis. "Surely her beauty alone should provide her with suitors."

Madame de Pailly spoke quite casually, without raising her eyes from her tapestry-frame.

"Oh, I can arrange a marriage for her at any time," replied the Marquis. "Madame de Pompignan would willingly give me her son d'Orsay, but his father was a farmer of the public revenue, and the Mirabeaus have never formed alliances with publicans. Besides, after all that I have written against the farmers-general, such a match would be humiliating. I have also had a young lawyer all lined with gold suggested to me, and as I do not care to appear too proud, I consulted Louise. 'Oh,' she said, 'I will never change my name for a worse; moreover, I do not know what use to make of riches, but I feel that if necessary I can always acquire them!'"

"Scarcely the sentiments one would expect of a naïve young girl fresh from a convent," remarked Madame de Pailly in the same unconcerned manner as before. "The sooner Louise is married the better, I should say——"

"Oh, there is plenty of time," interposed the Marquis. "I scarcely like to part with her; she is the only one

of my children who has ever seemed to understand me."

"Or the Marquise will be interfering," continued Madame de Pailly, without heeding his interruption, "and, who knows? she may induce Louise to refuse to go to the altar with a husband of your choosing."

"Impossible!" cried Brutus, bridling as she meant him to do; "Louise would never dream of taking her mother's side against me."

Madame de Pailly shrugged her shoulders and smiled sceptically as she bent over her tapestry. The Marquis knitted his brow thoughtfully. After a little pause he said anxiously:

"You seem doubtful?"

"Have your way, Merlou," she sighed carelessly, "but never say I did not warn you. Like all your children, even Gabriel, Louise is a Mirabeau *tout à fait*. And the Mirabeaus, as you yourself say, are not made like other people. They have a curious way of doing the opposite to what one expects." And Madame de Pailly looked up for a moment to note the effect of her words.

Egeria was no longer young, and Saturn with the nails of years had scratched off the bloom of beauty from her face. But the secret of her spells had lain in her mental, not her physical, charms. She governed Brutus hypnotically, as it were, and he obeyed her suggestions mechanically. Her reasoning had its due effect, and the Marquis now became as eager to marry his beloved daughter as he had hitherto been indifferent.

As usual when he had a child to dispose of, he consulted his brother.

"What do you say to young de Cabris?" wrote the Bailli. "He has an income of thirty thousand livres, and the family is, as you know, an honourable one. His mother will be glad to marry him to Louise; she has often suggested the alliance to me. But it is only fair to add that it is said, and pretty generally believed

in Provence, that there is madness in the family. I, however, attach little importance to this rumour."

"Impossible!" cried the Marquis, on reading this letter. "How can he dream of suggesting such a match?"

"He says he attaches little importance to the rumour," remarked the sorceress. "That is sufficient to dispose of it in my opinion. Did you ever know a man more cautious in his judgment than the Bailli?"

"I admit," said the enchanted Marquis, "I should take a strange sentimental satisfaction in this alliance. The de Cabris are a branch of the Clapiers family, to which the Marquis de Vauvenargues belonged. You have heard me speak of poor Vauvenargues, with whom in my army days I had a Damon and Pythias friendship?"

As Madame de Pailly played with her wonted skill on the emotion excited in the Marquis by the recollection of this devoted friend, whom death had cut off in the flower of youth, though not before he had carved a niche for his fame in history, the Bailli's *parti* was accepted for Louise.

Mademoiselle de Mirabeau, contrary to what might have been expected of her, made no objection to marrying a man she had never seen, and over whom hung the fearful shadow of insanity. She was too much of her century for the former consideration to have the least repugnance for her, and as for the latter, she probably "attached as little importance" to it as her uncle had done. But as the negotiations for her marriage proceeded, the storm which they brewed on her horizon began to break, and ever and anon a forked flash of lightning disclosed the reefs on which her life was being driven.

One of these rocks round which the tempest seemed to rage most furiously was the marriage settlement. The bride presumptive saw fit to be dissatisfied with

her *dot*, which, owing to the financial difficulties caused by his expensive quarrel with the Marquise de Mirabeau, her father was not in a position to make equal to that he had given his eldest daughter on marrying M. du Saillant ten years before. Louise declared that her youth was being taken advantage of to despoil her of her proper share in the legacies that old Madame de Vassan had left to her grandchildren. This was to cast an odious reflection on Madame du Saillant, who, placid and peace-loving though she was, could not always escape the veritable contagion of strife that, like some lingering disease, preyed on this strange family.

But perhaps the bitter jealousy that Louise cherished for her sister sprang less from Madame du Saillant's larger marriage portion than from her greater happiness.

"Caroline," said her father, speaking of her once to the Comtesse de Rochefort, "is a great, awkward, beautiful girl, what I might term a magnificent exaggeration. She has a good and gentle heart, and a bright, cheerful disposition. She has the heartiest laugh in France. But she is too compliant, too easy-going, and her hands are like a carpenter's tools. She would make a colossal nun, but one daughter in a sepulchre is enough, and the thought of the veil makes me ill. I must find her a husband."

Judging by the lack of commonsense that he showed in marrying his other children, the fact that Caroline found a husband in every way suited to her can only be attributed to luck. Her married life had been, and remained so to the end, an unclouded dream of happiness. M. du Saillant's chief occupation was to adore her and the children she bore him. But this spectacle of domestic bliss induced discord rather than harmony by perpetually reminding the Marquis and his distracted family of the peace that was denied them in their own homes. The silent reproach of Madame du Saillant's happy life, especially when she and her husband

attempted to make peace between their warring kindred, excited their jealousy and resentment. The animosity that Louise now saw fit to bear her sister only ceased when the Revolution brought both to the same level of distress.

Another rock, less threatening but more fatal, revealed in the storm caused by these marriage negotiations was the behaviour of the bridegroom-elect himself. The Marquis de Cabris formally, and not unnaturally, demanded an interview before marriage with his future wife. But the Marquis de Mirabeau deemed the manner in which this demand was made insolent, and refused it. Then de Cabris revenged himself by complying with all the conditions of the marriage contract and postponing the marriage itself. The day was no sooner agreed upon than he invented excuses for altering it. The high-spirited Louise, who had been willing to have a husband tainted with insanity thrust upon her without protest, objected to be treated in this way, and translated his delay in coming for her as an insult directed against herself. She bore it silently, however, preferring to be revenged on her father, whom she secretly accused of immolating her pride, when marriage should give her an advantage over him that was denied her under his roof.

"Louise conducts herself like an angel," wrote the Marquis impatiently to the Bailli, "but I will not answer for it that she thinks like one. For God's sake, force de Cabris to come to the scratch without any further shilly-shallying."

At last one winter day a travelling carriage arrived at Bignon, and the Bailli descended from it as well as the young de Cabris. His appearance was unprepossessing. In physique he was undersized and degenerate, in face vacuous and morose. His manners were still more unpleasant. He acted as if the marriage he had come to celebrate was a question of the utmost indifference to

him. The Marquis was astonished and upset, Louise irritated and sullen. A satanic desire to refuse at the last moment to be married ruffled her hitherto angelic calm. But the observant Madame de Pailly boldly took time by the forelock, and before Louise could put her thoughts into action she found herself married at midnight on the very day that de Cabris arrived! The next morning the Marquis gave his daughter his blessing, and the *berline* departed for Provence with the addition of the bride.

The young couple, who could only count thirty-six years between them, settled at Grasse, where de Cabris had a house, which both he and his wife preferred as a residence to an ancestral *château* in the country. But Madame de Cabris had no sooner arrived in her new home than she began to steer her life with all sails set straight towards the reefs. To "get even" with her father who had sacrificed her pride and the sister whose *dot* had doubled hers, she took up her mother's quarrel, and openly abetted the Marquise, whom she had neither seen nor heard from since infancy, in her lawsuit for divorce and the absolute control of her fortune. It was destined to be a turbulent alliance, and ended finally in a hand-to-hand fight between the mother and daughter; but while it endured it caused immense misery, and dragged the name of Mirabeau in the mud. The effect on the Marquis of this treachery, as he deemed it, was to exasperate him against his once favourite child to a pitch of hatred that he never felt even for his eldest son. In the heat of his anger he swore never to see her or forgive her—an oath that Madame de Pailly took care he should keep.

"Pardon her!" he shrieked, shaken for a moment by the suggestion from the lethargy of death. "I would as soon think of pardoning the devil! She is of the stuff of which the damned are made!"

Madame de Cabris had been married three years

when her brother came to Aix in search of a wife. It was ample time for the consequences of such a marriage as hers to manifest themselves. Her husband had already developed the symptoms that later on made it necessary to put him into a strait-jacket, and the wife sacrificed to him had not failed to take her revenge. She had given herself a lover with the intention of offending her husband, but as this proved impossible she directed her spite against society. The licence she permitted herself set fire to the sleepy little town of Grasse, and left strange rumours about her wherever she went. In everything she did she was perfectly fearless, reckless, original—Riqueti *tout à fait.* Whenever the strange Mirabeaus were the topics of conversation Madame de Cabris' name was ever to the fore. It was known all over France that she had challenged a woman with whom she had had a quarrel to a duel, and joined with her equally scandalous mother in thrashing their jailer when the Marquis once succeeded in getting them both temporarily in his power. As she poisoned all her actions with a bold and mordant wit, she made as many vindictive enemies as a poet who delights to "startle the *bourgeois.*" But the wise gods may cause even an infamous notoriety to serve a useful purpose. In the degradation of the name of Mirabeau to those depths that made Respectability shudder—an effect that Madame de Cabris' reputation contributed to produce—her brother, in the hour of Revolution when miracles are wrought, was able, by the horror and disgust he inspired, to terrorise tyranny and tear liberty from its grip.

As Grasse was not far from Aix, and the society of the former were included in the Comte de Valbelle's Court of Love, it was a matter of course that the brother and sister should meet.

"That, I suppose, cannot be helped," the Marquis had said to his son when Mirabeau was leaving for Aix; "but

beware of her, she is the enemy of her race. I warn you, I command you, to avoid all communication with her as you would a leper!"

On a nature like Mirabeau's such a prohibition was calculated to produce quite the contrary effect to that intended. He was, however, too anxious not to offend his father to seek an interview with a sister who was to him a total stranger, and who by declaring herself her mother's partisan included him among her enemies. But their meeting when living in such close proximity to one another could not be long deferred. It occurred one night in the theatre at Aix, shortly after his arrival in the town, and was curiously original and in keeping with the character of each.

Looking up at the boxes after the curtain had fallen on the first act, Mirabeau noticed an extremely beautiful woman gazing down upon him. As she caught his eye she gave him a radiant smile. The blood bounded through his veins, a mist passed across his eyes, his heart stood still for a moment, and in a voice which betrayed his emotion he said to Limaye, who was with him:

"Tell me, who is that ravishing creature, there in the third box in the second tier, in gold brocade? I have never seen a woman so gloriously beautiful!"

"What," replied Limaye with a laugh, as he glanced up, whereupon the lady beckoned to them with her fan, "do you mean to say you don't recognise your own sister, Madame de Cabris?"

A couple of minutes later Mirabeau was in her box.

"So you are Louise?" he faltered, as he stood before her a-tremble with wonder and admiration. "When I last saw you, you were a little child of seven or eight. How did you know me?"

"I guessed it was you because you were with Limaye, and I was positive when you looked up. 'No one but Gabriel,' I said to myself, 'could be so ugly.' You are '*tout Vassan*,' you know, as papa used to say."

The adorable smile she gave him took the insult from her words.

"How beautiful you are, Louise!" he murmured. "Why should we be enemies? There is no logic in such a thing. Let us be friends."

"You are horribly ugly," she replied with a little laugh, "and I ought to hate you. I know why you have come to Aix, and I have sworn to prevent you from accomplishing your object, but I am not sure that I don't like you after all."

"But you will be my friend," he said earnestly. "You know what a life mine has been; I have so longed for a friend."

"So have I," she sighed pensively, "I have so many enemies." And the tears gathered in her beautiful eyes.

"They shall be mine," he said with a passionate oath, and bending over her hand he kissed it.

From that moment the brother and sister had been inseparable.

The singularity of their meeting and the quickness with which they had bridged the gulf of family discord that had separated them possessed just the dramatic element and novelty that appealed to the imagination of both. They rushed into their friendship with the impulsive and passionate ardour that was, as it were, endemic in the blood of the Mirabeaus. Madame de Cabris had been of invaluable assistance to her brother in his courtship of Emilie de Marignane, and she was the only one of his blood relations who had been present at his wedding. Though unable to disentangle him from his debts, her attachment had nevertheless provided him with the food on which his soul had existed during the famine of his life at Mirabeau and Manosque. It was, therefore, out of the question that he should resist the temptation of seeing her again when he found himself so near Grasse, especially after the events that had brought him thither.

Madame de Cabris's own life had not been without its troubles since Mirabeau had left Aix. When he arrived at Grasse he found her compromised in a ridiculous affair which had raised the society of the whole town against her and her husband. A while before the inhabitants had awakened one morning to find Grasse placarded with obscene and insulting verses directed against the wives of the leading men of the place. With the unenviable reputation she had earned for herself, suspicion attached itself to Madame de Cabris as being the only lady of position not attacked in the verses.

"Pshaw!" was all the defence she deigned to make; "the verses are too destitute of wit to be mine."

Nevertheless, a criminal prosecution was instituted, from which it transpired that M. de Cabris, deeming the malignity with which his wife was being treated by the society of Grasse as a personal insult, had secretly planned this foolish revenge. He had been obliged to pay enormous damages, and Madame de Cabris had since been active in trying to hush up the affair. But the malicious scandal that had excited her husband's mad action did not cease, and among those who had expressed their opinions in regard to her the most obnoxiously was the Baron de Mouans, who by virtue of his connection with the great Court family of Villeneuve was a power in Grasse. As Madame de Cabris was too much of a Riqueti to submit to insult, she had been meditating how she could effectively revenge herself on her enemy. The arrival of Mirabeau at such a moment was consequently doubly welcome to her, and she enrolled him at once in her quarrel.

"I will send him a challenge," he cried; "nothing will give me greater pleasure than to spill his blood. He shall be taught that a Mirabeau is not to be insulted with impunity."

"No, that would never do," replied his sister quickly and firmly. "You must return to Manosque before it is

known that you have left it. A duel would publish to the world that you had broken your parole, and I will not have your punishment increased on my account, if I can prevent it. No ; a duel is out of the question. We must devise some other revenge."

Madame de Cabris, whose tastes were as extravagant as her brother's, had recently built a charming miniature Trianon, known as the Pavillon des Indes. It was situated in the midst of a little wood of olives on the slope of a hill overlooking the villages of Mouans and Sartoux. Adjoining it was a small estate belonging to the Baron de Mouans, who was at the time engaged in making on it some extensive improvements which, as Madame de Cabris knew, he was in the habit of riding out from Grasse every day to inspect. Mirabeau had arrived at Grasse at night and was to start for Manosque on the following day. The Pavillon des Indes was on his road. What if she should take him there the first thing in the morning and show him the place ? Without doubt Mouans, as was his custom, would visit his estate ; they would be sure to see him ; she knew her brother ; he would not fail to pick a quarrel with Mouans ; there would be no inquisitive eyes to spy on them, and afterwards he could continue his journey.

Cunningly concealing her motive, she invited him to lunch at her villa. Mirabeau readily agreed, as she knew he would, and at an early hour they mounted their horses and galloped rapidly out of the town. Madame de Cabris, like the famous Duchesse de Longueville, with whom, save in an instinct for political intrigue, she had much in common, was dressed in male attire—a costume that greatly became her, and which when riding she generally wore, to the scandal of Grasse. She was accompanied by the lover she had taken immediately after her marriage—the Chevalier de Briançon, a dashing, unprincipled Adonis who supported life by gambling—later on by forgery—and a subaltern's commission in the army.

Before the dew had vanished the party in high spirits arrived at their destination. It was not till after lunch, which they had taken *al-fresco* in the garden of the villa, that Mouans was perceived.

Madame de Cabris, whose rage had been whetted by a fresh calumny related by Briançon of which her enemy was the author, no sooner saw Mouans than she exclaimed with a sigh of relief—for in her impatience she had despaired of his coming, "There is the scoundrel!"

At such a moment the mere sight of him was like a match applied to the gunpowder of Mirabeau's impetuous nature. Springing to his feet, he rushed down the garden, and leaping over a low wall that separated it from the property of the Baron de Mouans, confronted that astonished gentleman, whose fat, apoplectic figure, in spite of the protection of an umbrella, was dripping with perspiration as he moved about amongst his workmen in the full blaze of a Provençal August sun.

"Canaille," cried Mirabeau, with the theatrical rhetoric which never deserted him when excited, and brandishing his riding-whip, which he was carrying, "your manners, like those of a filthy dog, deserve to be corrected by the lash. But for the sake of the rank in which destiny by an accident has permitted you to masquerade, I will pay you the honour to demand the sort of satisfaction that it is obligatory for a gentleman to give another whom he has grossly insulted. Time presses and the locality is favourable. The sooner we draw our swords the better. I wish to cleanse your veins of their impurity."

The Baron de Mouans was between fifty and sixty, and age, coupled with obesity, made him timorous. Suddenly attacked by a young and powerfully built man whom he had never seen before, and whose wild eyes, distorted face, and strange language seemed those of some escaped maniac, he felt the hot sweat that was oozing from every pore of his fat body turn cold. Instinctively lowering his open umbrella between himself and his assailant, he

stepped backwards, as if for protection, towards a group of peasants from whom he was separated a little distance, and who appeared no less terrified than their master. His evident fright filled Mirabeau with contempt, while the sight of the open umbrella still further exasperated him. The idea that his haughty challenge, if not actually refused, should be responded to with an umbrella rather than with a sword, was but a fresh and humiliating insult to one in whose veins Riqueti blood was flowing like lava. Without more ado he sprang upon the retreating baron, or rather upon the extended umbrella which Mouans used as a shield, and tearing it from his hands, broke it over his body. But Mouans, having observed Madame de Cabris, who had followed her champion, now guessed who his assailant was. Reassured that he had not to deal with a maniac, he stood his ground and cried threateningly:

"I shall make you suffer for this outrage, young Mirabeau. I have plenty of witnesses to prove that you have wantonly trespassed on my property and insulted me!"

For answer Mirabeau, who was no longer responsible for his actions, raised his riding-whip, which he had dropped, and struck the Baron de Mouans across the face with it. The next moment the two grappled. In the struggle which ensued both tripped, fell, and rolled over one another, now one, now the other on top. Madame de Cabris, in the meantime, leaned over the wall of the garden shrieking with laughter, which she mingled with taunting abuse of the baron and encouragement to her brother, while Briançon endeavoured to prevent the peasants from coming to the rescue of their master.

The scuffle, for it was little more, did not last long. Mirabeau had no sooner closed with his unwieldy and elderly adversary than he realised both the absurdity and the indignity of such a quarrel. The moment that the

baron was at his mercy he released his grip, rose to his feet, and having picked up his riding-whip, leapt over the wall.

"I'll warrant the brute will not trouble you again, Louise," he panted. "And now for Manosque!"

"Yes, now for Manosque," said Madame de Cabris, suddenly sobered by the thought of the consequences to both herself and her brother from such an encounter.

And, followed by Briançon, she accompanied him back to the villa, from whence, having hastily removed the marks of his struggle, Mirabeau rode without further adventure and with all possible speed to Manosque.

CHAPTER VI

PERSECUTION

THE Baron de Mouans determined to have full and immediate reparation for the assault of which he had been the victim. According to the aristocratic code of honour, reparation for such an insult as he had received was only to be obtained by means of a duel. But as Mouans, to judge from his wanton and malicious vilification of Madame de Cabris, possessed neither the chivalrous instincts nor the sense of dignity that among the *noblesse* were supposed to be the special attributes of their caste, it was not surprising that his conduct in the present instance was entirely governed by resentment, exasperation, and cowardice. The idea that he, an elderly and obese man, merely for sake of conforming to the etiquette of his order, should give a young, nimble, and skilled swordsman, who had already horsewhipped him, the further satisfaction of running him through the stomach was one that he did not entertain for a moment. It was revenge rather than reparation that he wanted. Consequently, instead of sending a challenge to Manosque he sent a writ, which formally summoned "the Comte de Mirabeau to appear before the Parliament of Aix for assaulting the Baron de Villeneuve-Mouans on the 4th August, 1774, with intent to kill."

"It is the revenge of a *bourgeois*," remarked Madame de Cabris contemptuously, on whom as well as on Briançon

similar writs were served. "I always said that the blood of the Villeneuves was yellow!"

But the ridicule to which Mouans was exposed by publicly declaring himself the victim of a murderous assault when he had merely received a few scratches and contusions was no consolation to Mirabeau, whose departure from Manosque in defiance of the *lettre de cachet* which detained him there was thus brought to the notice of the authorities. He knew that if this trial took place he would be condemned to pay heavy damages and perhaps suffer imprisonment in a fortress.

From this fate, on which Mouans based his revenge, there appeared to be but two possible means of escape—flight over the frontiers, or the prevention of the trial by the influence of the Marquis. The former alternative meant poverty and hardship in a foreign country, persecution, disinheritance, perpetual exile. It was not to be entertained for a moment. The latter meant an appeal to an enraged and prejudiced father, and seemed almost as hopeless to Mirabeau as the other. Nevertheless, he resolved to make the appeal through the personal mediation of his wife, on whose gratitude for the generosity he had shown in the Gassaud affair he believed he could count.

"Emilie," he said, on receiving the writ, "there is no time to be lost; you must go at once to Bignon and get my father to intervene at Court in my behalf without delay—to be, in a word, my advocate in this, the most important affair of my life."

The mortification that Emilie suffered from the discovery and forgiveness of her infidelity added to the bitterness of the exile she was forced to share with her husband. Previously it had given her a sort of sour satisfaction to vent her spleen on him, but now even this was denied her by the turn of the tables. Forced to chew the cud of her ill-humour in secret, the resentment she bore him for the unhappiness of their marriage, which

she selfishly attributed entirely to him, was so great that she would have hailed his present trouble with joy if she had thought it would release her from him. But she believed that as his wife the peril that threatened him threatened her as well, and his appeal met with an instantaneous response.

"Certainly," she said tearfully, "I will go. But suppose your father should refuse to listen to me? Think how he hates you and how Madame de Pailly hates you! She has such influence over him, she may persuade him to leave you to your fate."

"Never!" he cried. "It is incredible that in such a matter as this my father should not stand by me. Any one placed as I was must have acted as I did; it was my duty to defend the honour of my name, which was shamefully insulted. In such a situation the whole family, whatever their differences, must unite. Is there anything so extraordinary in my having taken the trouble to dust the jacket of an insolent fellow who has been base enough to inform the world of the trouble I took to dust it? No, when it comes to avenging the insulted honour of a Riqueti even Madame de Pailly will be powerless to prevent my father from applauding the avenger!"

"Well," she said, "I will do my best for you. And perhaps," she added shrewdly, "it may aid me if I take little Victor with me."

"You are right," he replied, "take Victor with you. The sight of his grandson, the heir of his race, should add fuel to his pride."

Before Emilie's arrival at Bignon the news of *l'affaire Mouans*, as it came to be called, had reached the Marquis. He was duly incensed at the insult that had been cast upon the name and honour of his family, but the anger that Mouans aroused in him was mild compared with that which he felt towards his son. The hatred he bore his daughter would of itself have been sufficient to enrage him against any member of his family who should have

championed her. Of all the offences of which Mirabeau had been guilty in his father's eyes, not the least vexatious was the friendship he had formed with Madame de Cabris. Since she was the open ally of her mother the Marquis had at once jumped to the conclusion that his son also was on the side of the latter. He had as yet no proof of this, but he was right in his conjecture, for while at Manosque the mother and son had become secretly reconciled through the mediation of Madame de Cabris. There was therefore no need on this occasion for Madame de Pailly to fan the flame of his hostility.

The Marquis had already commenced to forge his thunderbolt, no easy matter considering he meant to blast the revenge of Mouans with it as well as to crush his son, when Emilie arrived at Bignon. Her presence at such a moment served but to complicate his difficulties. What if she, the heiress to a great fortune on which he counted to retrieve his own, shattered by lawsuits and extravagant experiments in Economy, should bring the Marignane influence to bear on behalf of her husband? The thought was sufficient to include her too in his anger, and it was only the fear of the consequences of estranging her that prevented him from displaying it. The Riquetis were not people to put a restraint on their feelings, but with a daughter-in-law to pacify, a Mouans to cheat, a son to crush, a wife and a daughter to checkmate, even a Marquis de Mirabeau may learn how to be subtle. Thanks to the invaluable assistance he received from Madame de Pailly, he succeeded as if he had made a practice of cunning all his life.

"The Marquis does nothing but cover me with kisses," Emilie wrote her husband on the night of her arrival at Bignon, "and he is charmed with Victor. Madame de Pailly tells me that she has never seen him in such good humour. I believe he is going to take you completely back into favour. You should hear him denounce Mouans! He has ordered his coach to be ready in the

morning to take him to Paris. He did not tell me his motive and I did not like to ask, but it is easy to guess that it is for the purpose of using his influence to defeat Mouans. I am to go with him. This favour I owe to Madame de Pailly, who appears very fond of me, for I overheard her saying to the Marquis, 'Why not invite Emilie to go with you? After being deprived so long of the pleasure of Aix she would enjoy a few days in Paris. Take her, Merlou; I am sure she would appreciate the attention.'"

Little did Emilie dream how much it cost the Marquis to feign the gaiety with which he welcomed her; and, indeed, so great was the effort "when covering her with kisses" to prevent himself from scratching her, had it not been for the proud and real pleasure he experienced on seeing his grandson for the first time, the mask must have been torn from his feline cordiality. As little did she guess that Madame de Pailly had inspired him with the idea of converting her mission in behalf of her husband into the poison, so to speak, in which the Marquis might dip the shaft he was preparing to aim at his son! The sense of honour on which the Friend of Men prided himself was all but perverted under the influence of Madame de Pailly and the passion excited by his struggle with his wife. When he stooped to baseness he was no longer conscious of the act.

On arriving in Paris from Bignon, the Marquis, having left his daughter-in-law at his house in the Rue de Seine under the impression that he intended to exert his influence in Mirabeau's behalf, at once proceeded to his friend the Keeper of the Seals and demanded a fresh *lettre de cachet*. By means of this he secured the right of punishing his son as he saw fit, and consequently revenged himself at the same time on the Baron de Mouans by cheating him of the revenge that he had contemplated.

"I demand this *lettre de cachet*," he said to Malesherbes,

with a cunning that he had never before employed when making a similar request, "not so much as my right as to satisfy the just resentment of the royal authority, which my son has set at nought. As a sop to the Parliament of Aix, which is thus prevented from judging him, I intend to select the Château d'If as his prison, which, though not under the jurisdiction of the Parliament, is at least a Provençal fortress."

His request was granted, and the *lettre de cachet* was despatched, as soon as it was signed by an indifferent King, to Manosque. A week later, when the Marquis judged that Mirabeau was arrested and on his way to the Château d'If, he broke the news to Emilie, who in the meantime, petted and cajoled by her father-in-law, and delighted with tasting once again the social gaieties of which she had been so long deprived, had written to her husband that her mission was successful.

"I have been obliged," said the Marquis to her with feigned dejection, "to save Gabriel from the vengeance of Mouans by myself becoming his jailer. I shall keep him in the Château d'If until this Mouans affair has blown over."

He did not add that he had instructed d'Alègre, the Governor of If, to keep his prisoner in the strictest confinement.

The thought that *she* would be obliged to accompany her husband to the classical fortress in the harbour of Marseilles, whose dungeons were said to be more terrible than those of the Bastille, reduced her to tears.

"The Château d'If!" echoed Emilie with a shudder. "Oh, what a horrible fate for me!"

"That, my child," replied the artful Marquis soothingly, "would scarcely be a fitting residence for the Comtesse de Mirabeau. I think it would be pleasanter for you to go back to your father at Aix."

Though the society of the *salons* to which Emilie had been introduced during her visit to Paris was too grand

and intellectual to provide her with the frivolous amusements to which she had been addicted at Aix, it had at least made the past seem like a bad dream from which she had awakened. If her mission had proved disastrous to her husband, it had proved fortunate to her. No longer obliged to share his fate, she regarded it with absolute indifference, if not with secret satisfaction, and whatever grief she felt, if grief it might be called, was instantly forgotten at the prospect of returning to her beloved Court of Love. To have insisted on following the man whose name she bore to his prison would have been impossible to so volatile and selfish a woman.

"It was inevitable," she wrote him callously, "that you should pay for leaving Manosque without permission, and it is fortunate for you that your father has saved you from the condemnation of the Parliament of Aix. No one could be kinder to me than he, and I will urge him to release you as soon as possible. In the meantime, employ that magic which you possess to such a wonderful degree when you wish to enchant any one."

Having thus launched his thunderbolt, the Marquis despatched his daughter-in-law to her father at Aix and returned with grim satisfaction to his Egeria at Bignon and those pursuits in the interest of humanity between which and warring with an unmanageable family his time was divided. But had he foreseen the consequences of the rage and duplicity he had so successfully manœuvred, it is possible that even he, implacable and self-willed though he was, might have been induced to fling a pardon instead of a punishment at his son. In any case he could not have acted more unwisely than he did.

The manner in which the Marquis's *lettre de cachet* was served on Mirabeau was as brutal as his father could have desired. Arrested as if he were a cutpurse, he was torn from his house in the clothes he stood in and hurried

into the coach that was to convey him to Marseilles without time to dispose of his effects or to make preparations for the journey. Far from rebelling against this treatment, he submitted to it meekly, stunned by the unexpectedness of the blow; for from Emilie's letters he had been led to believe that her mission was a success, and with his customary impetuosity he had even begun to indulge a hope of completely regaining his father's favour.

Swift as was his departure from Manosque, it was not unobserved. To degrade him still further, the news of his arrest had collected at his door an inquisitive rabble, which, on seeing him appear surrounded by *gens d'armes*, expressed with a shout of derision the peculiar delight it took in the humiliation of an aristocrat. For a moment, however, a ray of light unexpectedly pierced the intense blackness of the cloud of despair that enveloped him. The Chevalier de Gassaud, elbowing his way to the coach, implored permission to say a word to the prisoner in private, which was granted. Since the day on which Mirabeau's chivalrous pardon of his treachery—a pardon that had saved his life and his prospects—heaped coals of fire on his head the *mousquetaire* had not dared approach him. Tortured with remorse, his thoughts had wandered round and round the friend he had wronged like some damned spirit round Paradise, when the news of Mirabeau's arrest offered him the means of atonement.

"You once gave me your friendship," he said huskily as he thrust his head into the coach in which Mirabeau sat dazed with the blow he had received; "I never realised what it was worth till I lost it. To win it back is more than I dare to hope, more than I dare to ask. But you shall not leave Manosque believing me indifferent to your fate. Between here and Marseilles there will be plenty of chances of escape. You have already stabbed me to the heart: strike again by accepting from me the post-chaise that I will procure to carry you across the

frontier, and this purse of a hundred louis to defray your expenses!"

These words, uttered in a tone of agitated entreaty, roused Mirabeau from his lethargy.

"No," he replied, waving aside the purse, "to flee would be to ruin me utterly." But, touched by Gassaud's evident sincerity, he gently pressed his hand. Further parley was impossible.

"Come," cried the *gens d'armes*, "it is time we were *en route*." And roughly pushing the *mousquetaire* aside they entered the coach, which at once rolled out of Manosque.

At the Château d'If his arrival was preceded by letters from the Marquis, in which the enraged father painted his son in the blackest colours and demanded that he should be treated with the greatest rigour. But d'Alègre, the governor of the fortress-prison, was humane; the chains rusted in his terrible dungeons from want of use. Confident that the sea, which surrounded the rock of which he was the absolute lord, effectually cut off escape, he was in the habit of allowing his half-dozen galley-slaves to come out upon the battlements and breathe the pure air. To the prisoners of state that were sent him from time to time he was still kinder, and as dulness was as repugnant to him as suffering, he offered the hospitality of an Arab sheik to his *lettres de cachet*. He received Mirabeau as his guest, and gave him every liberty it was in his power to confer, save that of leaving his gloomy rock.

At first Mirabeau made no attempt to take advantage of the governor's friendship. Persecuted by his father for defending the honour of a name which he had been taught to regard as dearer than life, and heartlessly abandoned by his wife whose infidelity he had generously forgiven, his spirit was crushed. He tasted all the despair of the misunderstood, all the agony of betrayal, and he resolved in the bitterness of his heart to endure with-

out a murmur the severity to which he had been condemned.

"I have not deserved the treatment I have received from my father," he said to d'Alègre, "but he shall make me break my heart before he succeeds in hardening it. He has forbidden me to correspond with any of my relations; well, I will obey him, and sooner than appeal for mercy I will knock down the walls of my dungeon or bite red-hot cannon balls!"

But circumstances proved too strong for this resolution. He had barely arrived at the Château d'If when Madame de Cabris and the Marquise bribed sutlers to smuggle letters into his prison. In these, which he could not resist the temptation to read, though at first he refrained from answering them, he was informed that his mother and sister were noisily active in his behalf. The Marquis had been condemned by his entire family, including the Bailli, and even the placid Madame du Saillant was loud in defence of her brother.

"Your imprisonment," wrote his mother, eager to turn to her own advantage the unanimity with which her children had risen against their father in defence of the family honour, "was not the consequence of condemnation, since no sentence has been passed on you; nor the result of public opinion, for everybody, including the relations of Mouans, concur in blaming and despising his dastardly conduct; nor has it proceeded from insulted ministerial or royal authority, behind which your father has sheltered himself by the *lettre de cachet* he procured. No, your father only is responsible; he alone, the head of the Mirabeaus, has applauded the insult to his family; he alone is your enemy. Friend of Men, indeed!"

Nor were letters of sympathy and encouragement the sole means by which the family indignation was expressed. The Marquis' younger son, Boniface, expressed his in true Riqueti fashion. Ill in Malta, where he was

serving, he had no sooner been informed by Madame de Cabris of the Mouans insult and its consequences than the boy—he was only twenty—rose from his bed, dressed, and called on the captain-general of the galleys.

"Grant me leave, sir," he said, "to go to France on a family matter of great urgency."

Out of consideration for his uncle the Bailli, whose influence in Malta was very great, his request was granted. He went down to the harbour to find a vessel to take him to France. A gale was blowing and no captain could be induced to put to sea. The young Vicomte, however, was too impatient to wait till the weather was calm; by dint of threats, rather than money, for in spite of the fortune which he had inherited from his grandmother he was never overburdened with cash, he succeeded in procuring a vessel.

D'Alègre was absent when he arrived at the Château d'If, and the subordinate who was in charge of the fortress coolly advised him to return as he had come.

"Certainly," said the Vicomte haughtily, "when I have seen my brother."

"He is not to be seen," was the reply.

"Then I will write to him."

"That is equally out of the question."

"In that case, I shall wait here till M. d'Alègre returns."

"As you like, but I have no idea when he will return."

While he was stalking on the battlements in a fever of impatience, a woman, the wife of one of the warders, approached him.

"Though I run the risk of a beating from my husband," she murmured hurriedly, "I will take you to your brother to-night. There is nothing I would not do for M. le Comte."

And that night the brothers met for the first time since the memorable occasion ten years before when their mother was driven from Bignon.

"I entered his cell," Boniface wrote afterwards to Madame de Cabris in the curious melodramatic style natural to all his family, "not like a noble knight-errant, but like a pickpocket, or like a lover, just as you please."

In any other family but this, which was a law unto itself, and of which nothing could be taken for granted, the brothers should have been sworn enemies. As boys they had been exposed to every influence capable of exciting mutual jealousy and hatred. The younger, "all Mirabeau," had been told that he should have been the elder; and the elder, "all Vassan," that it would have been better had he never been born at all. Boniface had inherited and had already begun to squander the fortune that should have been Gabriel's. For one there had been nothing but stripes and abuse, for the other pettings and pardons. And even now, when the Marquis had bolted one of the brothers into a dungeon at If, he was procuring a commission in the army for the other. It was not, however, from affection that the father was so indulgent to his younger son, whose only value in his eyes was that he was a male by means of whom the sacred name of Mirabeau might be kept alive. Exasperated by his inability to mould his heir to his liking, the Marquis was petty enough to favour Boniface in the hope of spiting Gabriel.

At the sight of his brother, Mirabeau rose and clasped him in his arms.

"Ah, how strong you are!" gasped Boniface. "Why didn't you strangle Mouans?—you could have done it. But, though I am yet ill, I have two arms strong enough to break his cowardly back!"

Mirabeau looked at him with misty eyes.

"Mon ami," he said, "you would ruin us both. We must keep cool."

After a short and hurried meeting, in which Boniface's rashness was controlled by his brother's advice, the two

parted the best of friends—to quarrel and make up and quarrel again. But though bitterly divided by the Revolution, in which one battled in behalf of the monarchy as Riqueti-like as the other in behalf of the people, there were times when they buried the hatchet and clasped one another as they had clasped in the dungeon of the Château d'If.

Agitated by secret letters and stolen interviews—once, too, Madame de Cabris disguised as a man succeeded in visiting her brother—Mirabeau finally took advantage of d'Alègre's goodwill. To one so restless, impatient, and full of energy, confinement of any sort was suffocating, idleness chafing. An inherited desire to write had been awakened in him by his *History of Corsica*. At Manosque, spurred by the dulness of his life and a sense of the tyranny of which he was the victim, he had given vent to his feelings in an *Essay on Despotism*. At the Château d'If, to fill his empty hours and with the object of pleasing his father, he set himself to compile the memoirs of the Mirabeaus. But this occupation only begat in him a desire for greater activity; imprisonment became intolerable, and with his health his resolution to submit without a protest succumbed. Breaking his silence, he appealed passionately to his uncle to be released.

"If I knew," he pleaded, "who had a kinder heart than yourself or a sounder judgment, I would apply to that privileged being and entreat him to beseech my father to put an end to my truly deplorable condition. My constitutional activity is such that if suffered to remain unoccupied it is fatal to my health. Believe me, uncle, there are men who require to be kept occupied, and I am one. I feel my health is giving way. I am ill, ill from lack of work. Unless you wish me to go mad, obtain my release; my heated brain throbs the more violently from the very effort I make to calm it!"

Since his marriage Mirabeau had lost the place he had

held in his uncle's affections. The Bailli, forgetting that he had been largely responsible for a marriage whose troubles he condemned rather than pitied, had sympathised with the anger and approved the severity of the Marquis towards his son. But it had seemed to him in his intense pride of family that the horsewhipping of the Baron de Mouans atoned for all his nephew's vices, and he had been the first to protest against the punishment Mirabeau had received in doing what he firmly believed and declared was his duty. On receiving this *cri du cœur* from the Château d'If, the Bailli, whose previous protests had been ineffectual, once again began to plead his nephew's ill health as an excuse for giving him his liberty.

"Pshaw," replied the Marquis, "he is shamming; I do not believe in his illness. Besides, if he were released his creditors would soon shut him up again."

"Have a care," returned the Bailli, "lest your obstinacy provide the public with a stone to throw at the Friend of Men. People already persist in thinking you rather severe with your children." And the uncle, who had been loud enough in denouncing his nephew's debts, now proceeded to find excuses for them.

"Have a care yourself," retorted the angry father, "how you suffer him to dupe you. While he was lamenting his ill health to you and lack of occupation, the scoundrel was engaged in ruining the wife of his warder! But as to what the world says of me, what matters it? If I were sensitive I should have died long ago. Let them call me the Nero of the age; the public, I repeat, are not my masters. You say that if I do not give him his liberty people will say I have a secret motive for keeping him in prison. Well, so I have, and the public, for whose opinion I have never cared, may know it. *I am interested in continuing his confinement lest he should come and support his mother.* There! And

you can assure the public that I shall play Rhadamanthus as long as I please!"

The virtuous Bailli, less horrified by the brutal cruelty of his brother than the reported immorality of his nephew, at once wrote to d'Alègre for further particulars. Hereupon d'Alègre, whose sense of humanity was outraged by the malignity with which his prisoner was persecuted, not content with assuring the Bailli that Mirabeau was innocent of the act of which he was accused, wrote as follows to the Marquis:

"You informed me, M. le Marquis, when your son arrived here, that his release would depend on my report of his good conduct. As the whole province is aware of your decision, and in justice to the Comte de Mirabeau of whom much evil is being said by his enemies, I have, therefore, much pleasure in obtaining from you his release by stating that since his imprisonment the Comte de Mirabeau has never given the slightest cause of complaint to any one. Whoever declares that he has seduced the wife of his warder, or any other woman at the Château d'If, is a liar. Such an accusation is a calumny, and the warder himself will swear to its falsity. To emphasise this I have forwarded to you the warder's statement, signed by his own hand. I am persuaded, M. le Marquis, that what I say will have a strong effect on the Friend of Men, and I assure you that when the Comte de Mirabeau departs from here he will carry with him the esteem and friendship of everybody."

This letter and the publicity with which d'Alègre now proceeded to champion Mirabeau exasperated the inflexible Marquis.

"The fellow has been up to his tricks again," he said savagely, handing the letter to Madame de Pailly. "I shall get that fool d'Alègre well reprimanded for disobeying my orders, but I will not release Gabriel. Yet,"

he added querulously, "what am I to do with him? The Château d'If has ceased to be a prison."

"That is not a difficult problem, Merlou," smiled Madame de Pailly soothingly. "Remove him to another."

And so it chanced that Mirabeau went to Joux. This event was the last milestone on the road to desperation along which his life was being driven.

CHAPTER VII

TEMPTATION

MIRABEAU found imprisonment at Joux far harder to bear than it had been at the Château d'If. He missed the Mediterranean and the sun. On the rock in the great and busy harbour of Marseilles he had at least been in touch with life. But at Joux, perched so high in the mountain fastnesses of the Jura that it was scarcely ever out of the clouds and covered with snow in the finest weather, he was completely cut off from the world, expatriated, buried alive. To be cheerful in such a place, though one tried, was impossible. It was here, banished among the bears of the Jura, that twenty-eight years later the noble negro, Toussaint-Louverture, was to die of a broken heart.

In selecting Joux as a prison for his son, the Marquis de Mirabeau had been influenced less by the dreariness of its situation than by the rank and reputation of its governor. The Comte de Saint-Mauris, who was in charge of this owl's nest, was an aristocrat whose family was closely connected by blood and marriage with some of the most powerful members of the Court. One of his relations, to whom he owed the governorship of Joux, and who probably deemed him unworthy of anything better, was the Prince de Montbarrey, the Minister of War.

But besides his birth, the Comte de Saint-Mauris had another qualification to recommend him to the

regard of the Friend of Men. Without the least claim to the notice of the society of the *salons*, he had "corresponded" with some of the high priests and priestesses of intellect, and in the solitude of Joux, for want of something more amusing to pass the time, he had read or skimmed the works of the Marquis de Mirabeau himself. In a word, in an age when it was incumbent on the man or woman of fashion to profess sympathy with one of the many varieties of "philosophy" in vogue, the Comte de Saint-Mauris labelled himself an Economist.

The Marquis really knew nothing of his character, but with so many points in his favour, he concluded in his usual impulsive and stubborn way that he had at last found a jailer for his son after his own heart.

"Saint-Mauris," he said to Madame de Pailly, "will not let himself be wheedled into a sickly sentimentality over my madman like that fool d'Alègre. He is another Lambert, but much older and more experienced."

The Governor of Joux was, in fact, sixty; and as the greater part of his life had been spent in camps or about the Court, he had had innumerable opportunities of acquiring experience if his essentially frivolous nature had been capable of benefiting by them. Nevertheless, though the Marquis was, as usual, wrong in his judgment, he had by accident found a jailer totally devoid of tenderness. Of all who had been in the past, or were to be in the future, set in authority over Mirabeau, the Comte de Saint-Mauris alone was insensible to his charm—even Lambert, had he desired, might have been his friend.

Provided, however, that Saint-Mauris' vanity was not wounded, the petty cruelty of which he was capable was not apparent. He could, when it pleased him, treat those in his power with the greatest consideration, and he welcomed Mirabeau to Joux quite as courteously as d'Aulan had done at Rhé or d'Alègre at If. He

promised himself a great deal of pleasure from the society of a young man whose past career proved at least that he was not dull. There was nothing that Saint-Mauris hated so much as dulness; and as it reigned supreme at Joux, where there were only a few old invalids dying in exile to talk to, he spent most of his time in the little town of Pontarlier in the valley below. But dulness reigned in Pontarlier too, and knowing that any one would be regarded as a veritable godsend to society who would give it something to talk about, Saint-Mauris, for the sake of the *réclame* of introducing to it a man so notorious as the Comte de Mirabeau, gave him permission from the very day of his arrival at Joux to come and go as he pleased.

Mirabeau, however, was too depressed to respond to the friendly advances of his new jailer. For three weeks nothing would induce him to go to Pontarlier. But the melancholy of the solitude of Joux finally made his own melancholy insupportable; he was young and naturally restless, and Saint-Mauris was persistent. Finding that an appeal to his prisoner's sense of pleasure, which from its excessive development in himself he imagined to be correspondingly developed in others, had failed, Saint-Mauris next appealed to his vanity.

"You could do me a great favour if you would," he said to Mirabeau one day.

"What might it be, pray?" was the listless reply.

"Give me the use of your pen."

"The use of my pen!" exclaimed Mirabeau bitterly. "Of what use has it ever been to any one? Besides, all that I write must be published abroad; it is not safe for my name to be attached to anything."

He was thinking of his *Essay on Despotism*, written while at Manosque and published anonymously at Neufchâtel, lest a jealous Government should persecute the author. His secret, however, had not been kept, and it was suspected all over France that he had written this

celebrated tract, which was being smuggled into the country and eagerly read even at Versailles itself.

"Oh, I do not want you to write me another *Essay on Despotism*," said Saint-Mauris, "but an official account of the *fête* in Pontarlier to-morrow in honour of the coronation of Louis XVI.—to be, in fact, our historian."

The life so long stagnant in Mirabeau surged once more in his veins; his heart beat fast, his pulses throbbed, the fervour that flamed in his splendid eyes illuminated his dark and scarred features with a sort of beauty. Saint-Mauris had succeeded at last in rousing him from his lethargy, but it was the nobility, not the vanity of Mirabeau that had responded to the governor's appeal. The mention of the new King had reminded him of the new era that began with every reign, an era in which Hope, like the Phœnix, was born again from its own ashes. The domestic tyranny of which he was the victim made him hate tyranny in any shape; his own sufferings gave him a kinship with the nation's; its hopes bid him too hope. All France had fixed its eyes longingly on the new Louis—*Louis le Désiré* as it called him; never in the history of the monarchy had there been such joy, never had the auroral hopes of a new reign been so radiant. Even at Joux there was rejoicing. Saint-Mauris' exiled invalids remembered that pardons were distributed at coronations. Why should this new reign not be as auspicious to a Mirabeau as to any one else?

"To consent," he replied eagerly, "seems too slight a thing to be termed a favour."

"Then I shall count on your attendance at the *fête*," said Saint-Mauris, who was taking a conspicuous part in it, and was delighted at the prospect of having his glory chronicled by the pen of the author of the *Essay on Despotism*.

"Yes, you may count on me," said Mirabeau; "I should like to have a share in welcoming an era which promises

so much happiness. In going to your *fête* at Pontarlier to-morrow I shall feel as if I had begun a fresh career."

Of the half-dozen families that comprised the society of Pontarlier that of de Monnier was the most important. This family, which belonged to the *noblesse* of the robe, was expiring in the person of Claude Francis, Marquis de Monnier, Lord of the Manor of Courvière, Mamirole, and other places. He had twice been married, and twice had his domestic affairs furnished Pontarlier and the adjacent provinces with abundance of food for scandal. It was during the lifetime of his first wife, when he was President of the Chamber of Accounts at Dole, that disgrace first gave a mortifying notoriety to his name. The *affaire* affected the reputation of his only child, Mademoiselle de Monnier. This young lady had fallen desperately in love with a dashing *mousquetaire* named Valdahon, whose proposal for her hand was rejected by her parents, who considered the family to which he belonged too mean to be honoured by an alliance with that of de Monnier. Valdahon, however, resolved to win his mistress by foul means if not by fair, a resolve in which he was seconded by the lady herself. Fearing some such design, the Marquis de Monnier had a strict watch put upon his daughter, who for greater security was compelled to pass the nights in her mother's room. But the lovers were undaunted by these precautions, and encouraged by the fact that her mother was a very heavy sleeper, Mademoiselle de Monnier succeeded in admitting her *mousquetaire* to the chamber in which she was confined. During one of these nocturnal interviews, however, the couple were surprised by an insomnia of the Marquise, who was so incautious as to publish her daughter's dishonour by imprudently rousing the house; for Valdahon, who had jumped out of the window, was caught in the garden by the servants before he could escape.

Having thus created the scandal which they had been so anxious to avoid, the parents foolishly made matters worse by placing their daughter in a convent and getting Valdahon imprisoned on a charge of seduction. The amour, however, far from being stifled by these measures, survived, and Mademoiselle de Monnier had no sooner come of age than she appealed to the courts for an order to enable her to marry Valdahon, and obtained it in spite of the opposition of her father. Shortly afterwards Madame de Monnier had died, and the Marquis, who was still furious with his daughter and her husband, determined to be revenged on them by marrying again, whereby he intended to deprive them of all claim to the inheritance of his fortune.

The family of de Ruffey, from whom the Marquis de Monnier chose his second wife, was one of the most important in Burgundy, and belonged, like his, to the *noblesse* of the robe. Its head, the Marquis de Ruffey, was President of the Chamber of Accounts at Dijon, an amiable man of refined and literary tastes, which inspired him with a desire to cultivate the society of the authors whose works he admired. Among the friends he had made in this way he ranked Voltaire and Buffon. The personality, however, which had made him worthy of their distinguished consideration was in the privacy of his home completely obscured by that of his wife. Madame de Ruffey, when visiting Voltaire with her husband, might possibly unbend the austerity which was said to conceal a witty and even tender nature, but in the bosom of her family she was a domineering wife and a stern, exacting mother. In an age of unbelief and loose morality, she was religious to the point of bigotry ; but with the narrowness of a Puritan she had the ambition of a *parvenue*. The chief object of her life was to promote the interests of her sons, and this she endeavoured to do by sacrificing to them those of her daughters. Of these the eldest had been forced to take the veil, a fate to which

the mother would have destined Sophie, the youngest, had not the girl's beauty held out a promise of a brilliant alliance for her family.

Avarice completely blinded Madame de Ruffey to considerations of happiness, or, in spite of her appalling respectability, to common decency. When her husband's famous friend Buffon lost his wife, she tried to make a match between the sexagenarian naturalist and her sixteen-year-old daughter. But though Buffon was too sensible to enter into such a marriage, fate seemed to have predestined Sophie de Ruffey to be the May to a January; for when she was seventeen her mother compelled her to marry the Marquis de Monnier, who was seventy-five.

In matrimony a great difference in age is by no means necessarily a bar to happiness. At sixteen Sophie had been eager to marry Buffon, whose looks were superb and personality lovable, and had she done so it is quite probable that she would have been thoroughly happy. But the Marquis de Monnier, unlike Buffon, was not attractive, and his character and temperament were the very antithesis of his bride's. He was miserly, peevish, devout, and dull; Sophie extravagant and fond of pleasure, free-thinking, and brilliant. Vibrant with youth, health, and intelligence, she chafed under the arbitrary restraint that his jealousy placed upon her, and which the consciousness of her superiority to him made but the harder to bear. At first she had tried to console herself with the thought that her husband's advanced age would speedily release her from the slavery into which she had been sold by her mother's ambition; but as Nature evinced no immediate intention of gratifying her in this respect, she had long ceased to count on his death, and looked for liberation elsewhere—and looked in vain. In the atmosphere of such an existence, an atmosphere as poisonous as that of an African forest, a neurotic tendency in her temperament was developed. She became morbid and

introspective and subject to fits of depression, to sudden and violent outbursts of passion, to vivid dreams of the happiness she felt that Nature had intended her for.

Pride, or some instinct of cunning, had prompted her to conceal the cause of her wretchedness, but the fact was apparent enough, and gossip laid the blame where it belonged, on her mother. The vanity of the puritanical Madame de Ruffey was hurt by the charge, and she sought to soothe it by accusing her daughter of ingratitude.

"It is said," she wrote from Dijon, "that I am responsible for your unhappiness. Is this fair? Have I not always made the greatest sacrifices for my children? Were you not always cherished and loved as a favourite daughter? You were eager enough to be married. I have only done for you what a mother should."

Exasperated by the knowledge that her private griefs had become the subject of public pity, Sophie vented all the bitterness of her soul on her mother.

"Loved and cherished was I?" she replied. "Do you think that a child's happiness depends on a few sugar-plums and caresses? All my happiness when at home was absorbed by the fear of marrying a man I could not love. It is true I longed for a change, for I was never happy, and once married I hoped to attach myself to what I called my duties, and to persuade myself I was happy in inducing others to think so. But the more I have tried the harder it has become. I am the solitary slave of my husband, who constantly finds fault with me. I am allowed neither money nor liberty, and my whole life is spent in playing whist with my master. If some day in desperation I do something terrible, it is you, you, you, who will be to blame!"

Instead of trying to reason with her daughter, or to make amends for the great wrong she had done her by a belated tenderness—for it was sympathy for which Sophie longed—Madame de Ruffey retorted with a cold,

puritanical reproof. Driven back into herself, scolded, neglected, misunderstood, crushed but not cowed, Sophie had existed five years in a state of smouldering rebellion when Pontarlier celebrated the coronation of Louis le Désiré.

Like everybody else, she had looked forward to the *fête*, which brought an element of excitement into her dreary and monotonous existence. The thought of the coronation had in particular excited her. It was seldom that she was permitted to indulge her love of gaiety; society in Pontarlier was restricted to a few families, its amusements were occasional and hedged with etiquette, and the Marquis de Monnier rarely accepted or dispensed hospitality. Such a function as a ball had not occurred during the five years of Sophie's marriage. It was an event in her life. For once the Marquis resolved to be generous; he knew that his wife would take precedence of every other woman, and he was proud enough to wish her to appear to advantage. She had taken a childish pleasure in sending to Paris for her dress and decking herself in the diamonds she had never before had the chance of wearing.

Never had she looked so beautiful as when she entered the ballroom. Her Paris dress showed the lines of her graceful and voluptuous form to perfection; the diamonds flashed in her blonde hair, flecked with powder, and round her throat, giving an additional splendour to the dazzling whiteness of her bosom. Excitement heightened the colour of her fresh complexion and gave a fire to her deep blue eyes, while a smile, half wistful, half coquettish, played on the sculptured mouth under her little tilted nose. Her mind was in a state of expectation. Who could tell what sympathetic spirit she might not discover in the crowd? Desire had turned the hope into a presentiment, which she longed with all her being to realise.

"Who is that lady blooming on the arm of that old

man like a flower on a ruin?" asked Mirabeau of Saint-Mauris as she entered.

"That is Madame de Monnier," he replied; "I'll warrant you have not seen a lovelier woman at Paris or Versailles. Come, let me introduce you. The de Monniers are the only people in Pontarlier worth knowing."

He crossed the room, and coming up behind Sophie, who was unaware of his approach, he said in a voice that trembled with conceit, inspired by the thought that all eyes were fixed on the man beside him, the lion for whose presence *he* was responsible:

"Marquise, I have at last persuaded the Comte de Mirabeau to leave his turret at Joux; allow me to have the pleasure of presenting him to you."

Sophie had shared in the general curiosity concerning this man, whose misfortunes and adventures had made so great a stir. From Saint-Mauris, whose close intimacy with her husband gave him daily access to the Monnier household, an intimacy that he had secretly and vainly tried to abuse, she had heard a great deal about Mirabeau. Unhappy herself, she had come to feel a sort of kindred sympathy for the victim of so many persecutions and injustices, the prisoner who was so wretched that when offered the liberty of *parole* he refused to take it. She felt she could understand his despair.

At the sound of his name, then, she turned at once and instinctively expressed the pleasure it gave her to meet him by the engaging frankness with which she offered him her hand. But she had no sooner beheld his fat, ungainly figure and his scarred, blotched face than she experienced a revulsion of feeling. From the stories she had heard of his power of fascination, a power that not even his jailers had been able to resist, she had expected to see an Adonis, for in speaking of him no one had mentioned his looks. It did not seem possible that he could ever have fascinated any one, unless it were with horror.

"How monstrously ugly he is!" she thought; "he looks like a peasant." And she could not repress a little shiver of repugnance as he bent over her hand and touched it with his lips.

The next moment Mirabeau raised his head and looked at her. She noticed with a thrill of astonishment that a change seemed to have come over his ugliness. The face she now beheld was lit up with intelligence; taken in detail, his features even appeared beautiful. He spoke, some mere commonplace, but what a voice! It gave a subtle character to his mouth, suggesting with all the force of an erotic temptation the kisses for which she had so often instinctively felt her own mouth made. But besides the sudden vibration of some carnal chord within her, she was conscious of an elevated, almost spiritual sensation that was communicated to her from his eyes. She had a strange feeling that a soul was looking at her out of those wonderful eyes, talking to her with that alluring mouth—a soul behind that mask of ugliness. The fancy troubled her like an obsession; she forgot her first impression of repugnance, and was seized with an unconquerable curiosity to penetrate the mystery of the monster who in the form of a satyr seemed to imprison the spirit of a man.

A change had indeed taken place in Mirabeau. Unhappiness—and he was most unhappy—exquisitely refines sensibility. Drawn to her at sight by her beauty, the delicious pity of the smile she had bestowed on him with her hand had given him a sensation of inexpressible happiness. His soul, as if seeking to fuse itself in another's, seemed to have passed from his lips when they touched her hand; on raising his head and looking at her he beheld it within her, and felt, as if their souls were already one, every emotion with which his had set hers vibrating. The sympathy, repulsion, and curiosity which within the space of a single glance had been excited in her were to him but the process of the fusion of his

spirit with hers. The power of the passion suddenly unchained in him gave him no doubts as to the result.

Before the ball was over not only had Sophie plunged headlong into the abyss whose depths she sought to plumb, but even her husband had yielded to Mirabeau's "terrible gift of familiarity."

"M. le Comte," the Marquis de Monnier had said, and his previous reputation for inhospitality emphasised the sincerity of his words, "while you reside in these parts I shall feel honoured if you will treat my house as yours."

CHAPTER VIII

FALL AND FLIGHT

THE five years of her marriage had been to Sophie not only a mental but a physical torment. On the desert island, so to speak, of the Marquis de Monnier's eighty years on which her youth was shipwrecked, her senses had starved like a castaway. The perpetual hunger that whetted the natural appetite of the flesh disordered her imagination, which in one so emotional was as sensitive to every bodily mood as a barometer to the weather. Her least desire became a craving, and the instinct of love turned to lust.

The moral deterioration that was produced by this carnal starvation accounted for her instant and complete conquest by Mirabeau. The animal in her had scented the beast in him. After the first spasm of repugnance that he had excited in her had passed, his ugliness had attracted her like a monstrous vice in the secret indulgence of which the senses obtain a sublime satisfaction. It made him appear to her the personification of that devilish *entrain*, that masculine energy which always fascinates women, and to which the withered age of her octogenarian husband by its contrast gave an additional force. Intercourse quickly revived the spiritual sympathy that his sufferings had previously aroused in her, and her passion for him daily increased till she became its slave.

Mirabeau, in his turn, set himself ablaze with the fire

he had lit in her. Ever since he had realised the failure of his marriage to give him happiness he had been unconsciously looking for some one to console him, to confide in. Hitherto he had only known desire, which at the best can but simulate love, but now he knew love itself. At sight of the beautiful Marquise de Monnier he had recognised what it was his spirit craved, and the more he saw of her the more he believed he had found it. Instinctively drawn to her by a sort of carnal magnetism, the resemblance in the unhappiness of their lives, the mutual need of friendship and similarity of their thoughts gave her the mysterious and powerful charm of affinity. Steeped, like himself, in the romantic sensibility of Rousseau—which was to the age in which they lived what Byronism was to the first and Ibsenism to the last decades of the nineteenth century—she infused him with that ardour, at once so precious and so fatal, from which spring those beautiful ideas and deep impressions that awaken great talents and lead to great success, but too often also to great failure and misery.

At any time, perhaps, the call of such a love as Sophie offered him would have been irresistible to Mirabeau. Nevertheless, this man whom his own father declared to be utterly depraved, this monster whom later the world at large believed to be destitute of the moral sense, quite forgetting that *non-morality* is not necessarily *immorality*, did not yield to the temptation of this splendid sin without a struggle. Sentimentality sitting in judgment on him would, no doubt, acquit him of guilt had he rushed into this snare of destiny voluntarily, but even justice must seek to find an excuse for him, beholding him resisting Riqueti-like the irresistible at a time when his strength was weakened by despair.

He made three distinct and successive efforts at resistance before he succumbed. The first was so sensible and practical that its failure made the others the more desperate. Remembering that he still held

a commission in the army, it struck him that if he could obtain permission from the Comte de Saint-Germain, the Minister of War, to resume his military duties he might, by effecting his release from imprisonment and removal from the neighbourhood of Pontarlier, succeed, with time and absence to aid him, in overcoming an attachment of which he realised the danger to Sophie as well as to himself. With this object he wrote the following characteristic letter to Saint-Germain :

"M. LE COMTE,—A letter is not well calculated to contain the particulars of my grievances, and to insert them would only tire your patience. I frankly admit my faults, but they have been exaggerated, as I can prove to you. For more than eighteen months past I have been detained in fortresses for an affair in which everybody acknowledges that I acted as became a man of honour. I am a Frenchman, my name is Mirabeau, and I am captain of dragoons. As a subject, a nobleman, and an officer I belong to my King. I only ask to serve him under any commander you may be pleased to designate. The Baron de Vioménil and Comte de Vaux knew me in Corsica, where I served under them with distinction, and if you will do me the favour to apply to them, they will vouch for me. I make this appeal to you as one noble to another.

"I have the honour to be, &c., &c.,

"COMTE DE MIRABEAU."

It had, perhaps, been wise had he slipped away to Paris, as he first intended, and appealed to Saint-Germain in person. Face to face with the Minister, his appeal might have been heard, but he was never able to communicate the subtlety of his charm to paper. The bombastic familiarity of his letter was of itself sufficient to excite prejudice against him. The Comte de Saint-Germain never so much as deigned to reply.

Having despatched the letter, he took the precaution while waiting for an answer to shut himself up once more at Joux. As time passed, however, and he realised that his appeal had failed, temptation lured him back to Pontarlier, and, still wrestling with it, he took as mistress a loose woman of the town. He hoped by avoiding the Monniers and the publicity he gave to his *liaison* to offend Sophie. But she was too madly in love with him even to feel jealousy. His powers of resistance were weakened by the passion she infused into her letters and the secret visits she paid him in the depth of night. Temptation had all but exhausted him when he made a final and heroic effort to conquer it.

"I am endeavouring to form for myself a shield of duty against a great temptation," he wrote to his wife, "and I implore you to come to me and help me. Your presence and that of my little son will strengthen me as nothing else can!"

It was an eloquent letter of eight pages.

But to Emilie, who had been revelling in the pleasures of the Court of Love for the last eighteen months, nothing could have been more repugnant than to leave Aix and share the dreary exile of an unloved husband at Joux and Pontarlier. She merely sent him a few cold lines in reply, insinuating that he had taken leave of his senses. It was on the receipt of this letter from his wife that Mirabeau yielded without further struggle to the passion that Sophie had excited in him. He had fought against temptation with the nobility of a Galahad, that lacked, perhaps, but Galahad's faith to have won.

"If," he wrote his implacable father, when the sin of which he was now the willing slave had led him to a cell in the Donjon of Vincennes—"If to have succumbed to the powerful seduction of a soul formed by Nature in a moment of magnificence be a crime, it was at least not an intentional one. As soon as I

realised the force of the passion that drew me and the Marquise de Monnier to one another I tried to reflect; for, knowing the impetuosity of my nature, I was dreadfully afraid of love. All that it was possible for a man placed as I was to do, in order to resist a temptation that I knew to be fatal, I did, and if at my death I am summoned to appear before the sublime Spirit which presides over Nature, this will be my answer: 'I am covered with dreadful stains, and Thou, great God, alone knowest whether I should have been as guilty as I am if my letter to my wife had been properly answered.'"

He made no other defence.

The intimacy between the Marquise de Monnier and the prisoner of Joux could not long remain a secret in a town so small as Pontarlier, and the husband of the lady, as usual, was the last to be informed of it. This was the more remarkable because the strict watch the Marquis de Monnier kept upon his wife was to a great extent due to his jealousy, for which there had been some excuse.

Twice during the four years of her slavery attempts had been made to soften its rigour. Two young officers attached to the garrison in Pontarlier, M. de Sandoncq and M. de Montperreux, had in turn sought to brighten this spring blighted by the frost of a long winter. Starving for sympathy, Sophie was ready to take it wherever she found it, and she had foolishly, but innocently, encouraged the admiration she excited, till her husband's jealousy extinguished it. Mirabeau's attentions, however, had not aroused the least suspicion in the old man, over whom he had acquired an inconceivable ascendancy.

Under cover of this blind trust the lovers might long have continued to despise the rumours that were circulated about them in Pontarlier but for the Comte de Saint-Mauris. The friendship that existed between the

Governor of Joux and the Marquis de Monnier had been abused by the former to further his own passion for Sophie. She, however, treated his advances with the greatest contempt.

"I have," she told him with brutal frankness when he first began to pay her his secret court, "lost my taste for old men."

Saint-Mauris, who was sixty and hideously ugly, was deeply wounded, but he was too infatuated to cease his attentions, and it was in the hope of overcoming her dislike that he had introduced his interesting prisoner to Sophie, never dreaming that in doing so he was likely to create a rival for himself. On discovering the intrigue which was fostered by his clemency he was consumed with jealousy, and in his resentment he displayed the natural meanness and cruelty of his character.

Not daring to inform the Marquis de Monnier of his wife's infidelity, lest she should retaliate by exposing his own treachery to him, Saint-Mauris started the rumours about her and Mirabeau, in the belief that they would eventually reach the ears of the injured husband. Finding, however, that this contemptible manœuvre had failed, he determined, as a certain means of gratifying his baffled spite, to compel Mirabeau to return to Joux. But it was as dangerous for Saint-Mauris arbitrarily to cancel the privileges he had granted his prisoner as for a king to withdraw a constitution. For Mirabeau had become immensely popular, not only in Pontarlier but throughout the province, and without giving a very plausible reason for confining him Saint-Mauris would have covered himself with odium.

Revenge, however, is never long at a loss for ways and means. The announcement that a bale containing copies of the censored *Essay on Despotism* had arrived from Neufchâtel suggested an excuse for severity. Giving out that he had received fresh orders from Versailles to place the author of this revolutionary tract in the

Tour de Grammont, the most terrible dungeon at Joux, Saint-Mauris ordered Mirabeau to return immediately to the fortress.

"I shall not obey," replied Mirabeau, who understood the motive of this new persecution, "till you show me the order from the Court."

Hereupon Saint-Mauris wrote in the most violent terms to the Marquis de Mirabeau, informing him of his son's intrigue with the Marquise de Monnier.

The anger of the prejudiced father may be imagined. His pride prevented him from soliciting the favour of an order to enforce the *lettre de cachet* that he had already procured and the effect of which had been nullified by Saint-Mauris' previous leniency. But he at once wrote to his son sternly commanding him to return to Joux.

"And when you have once more got him," he added in a letter to Saint-Mauris, "see that you put him in a healthy and dry place of confinement, but securely bolted and barred, till I can find another and more suitable fortress for him."

The receipt of his father's command, coupled with the thought of Saint-Mauris' power over him and his knowledge of Saint-Mauris' character, caused Mirabeau to dread the worst.

"This is the decisive moment of my life," he said to himself; "if I do not flee I shall be in captivity for years to come."

But to flee was to break his *parole*, to act in a manner unworthy of a gentleman, a noble, a Riqueti. With a curse he trampled on the temptation; it should never be said of him that he had broken his word like a *bourgeois* in order to escape from a dungeon. A dungeon! Who knew but that his father was preparing to send him to Doullens? But at the thought of this prison, at which even the bravest heart might quail, sophistry found him a plausible excuse for yielding to the temptation that obsessed him.

"After all," he muttered, "it is not as if I had given my *parole* to a man of honour and my equal. Saint-Mauris is baser even than Mouans. He is a monster who looks upon me with the eyes of a vulture ready to feed upon a corpse. With such a knave it is more disgraceful to keep a pledge than to break it."

To flee, however, without taking leave of Sophie was impossible. The fascination he exercised upon her husband provided him with the opportunity both to say farewell and to conceal his flight. For the Marquis de Monnier, still unsuspicious of what all Pontarlier was talking about, was giving a ball in his honour that very night, from which, after a last word with Sophie, he could make good his escape.

"Sophie," he said, when he raised his lips from the hand with which she greeted him, "our happiness has scarcely begun when cruel persons would tear it from us."

Before he spoke she had guessed that a crisis had arrived in their passion, and she was prepared for it. They had often discussed the possibility and consequences of detection; and their danger had given to their love a sublime frenzy. When caught they had resolved to flee together.

"I am ready," she murmured, with a glance that thrilled him.

He had made no plans. In his agitation he had with his usual impulsive impetuosity merely intended to ride across the frontier, which was close at hand, into Switzerland, and leave the rest to fate.

"To take you with me, dearest, is impossible," he replied sadly. "It has all happened so suddenly. I must go at once, to-night. As soon as I am in safety I will devise means for you to join me, but there is danger in every hour that I delay. Saint-Mauris has the power to arrest me at any moment; my father has commanded me to return to Joux, and if I fall once more into his hands I am a lost man!"

"If he leaves me to-night," she said to herself, "I shall never see him again."

She knew that it was impossible for her to go with him and that if he went alone his youth, birth, and sword would provide him with the means of existence.

The necessity for reflection, for self-possession, made her calm and cool.

"See," she murmured, "Saint-Mauris is looking at us. He suspects your intention. He has taken measures to stop you, and you will be arrested when you leave this house."

Mirabeau glanced towards the Governor of Joux and saw the smile of triumphant malice on his face. But the thought of the danger with which he now realised that his attempt at flight was beset did not daunt him; on the contrary, the reckless fearlessness of his Riqueti blood urged him to rush to meet it.

Sophie understood him too well not to guess what was passing in his mind. To detain him now she saw that she must tempt him with an adventure still more dangerous and daring than that of trying to outwit Saint-Mauris, and the intensity of her passion gave a spur to her imagination.

"Gabriel," she said half-audibly, "listen to me; if you go without me you will ruin yourself and cause my death. I should kill myself, for I could not live without you, whether you were across the frontier or sealed up in Joux. I have sworn it!"

The magnetism of her spell was too strong for him; face to face with her he could not but yield.

"Forgive me," he said humbly, "I can never quit you; I was mad to have fancied it!"

"Then you will be guided by me, beloved?" Her voice was like a flaming faggot flung upon the fire with which he burned.

"If I did not love you so," he answered, "Saint-Mauris could not prevent me from fleeing."

"And my love shall save us both," she whispered hurriedly; "I will hide you in my own room—no one will dream of looking there for you. Marie, my maid, alone will know, and she is absolutely loyal to us. Leave everything to me, and one night when the road is clear we will slip over the frontier together, you and I. Remember, heart of my heart, with me it is Gabriel or Death!"

At the audacity of her proposal he burst into a peal of laughter. Here, indeed, was an adventure suited to his genius, theatrical, romantic, full of danger.

"M. de Mirabeau is in high spirits to-night," observed the Marquis de Monnier to Saint-Mauris; "it makes me feel young again to hear him."

The next day it was known in Pontarlier that the Comte de Mirabeau had disappeared. The news created no astonishment.

"He has gone," people said, "in the nick of time."

It was believed that he was hiding in one of the little villages on the other side of the frontier, unable to tear himself from his Circean marquise. Saint-Mauris, whose baffled resentment made him a formidable enemy, felt convinced of it. His spies were on the look-out for the escaped prisoner for miles along the frontier, and a secret watch was put on the house of the Marquis de Monnier, whom his own infatuation and the general sympathy felt for his beautiful wife and her universally popular lover continued to keep in the dark.

It was their conviction of Saint-Mauris' crafty and vindictive nature that prevented Mirabeau and Sophie from running the risk of immediate flight, which, as pupils of Rousseau, they now regarded as the natural and sublime *dénouement* of a passion so theatrically beset with danger and romance. In the hope of wearing out Saint-Mauris' patience or throwing him off the scent, Sophie, with the aid of a faithful maid, concealed

Mirabeau several days in a cupboard in her bedroom. The very rashness of the act was in itself sufficient to avert suspicion. The servants, however, in spite of every precaution, soon surmised that there was a secret in the house that was purposely being kept from them, and it became urgent to provide another shelter for Mirabeau. Sophie confided in a friend of her own sex, on whose devotion she could count, and in the depth of night the fugitive was smuggled in disguise from the house of the Marquis de Monnier to that of a neighbour.

Further delay in fleeing had now become dangerous, and the following night was hurriedly fixed upon for flight. The hour chosen was that at which the servants supped. An accident at the last moment prevented the maid of the Marquise from playing the part assigned her in this clandestine flight. A woman, seeing a figure skulking in the courtyard, cried out that there was a thief in the house. In an instant all the servants gave chase ; the whole house was in confusion. The danger made Sophie bold.

"Fools!" she cried; "return to your supper ; it is a false alarm!"

But they were not to be deterred from their pursuit; by the light of their lanterns they had seen the footprints of a man in the flower-beds of the garden. In despair, Sophie was obliged to follow them.

"You see, Madame la Marquise, there *was* some one after all!" exclaimed the coachman, who led the pursuit, when Mirabeau, unable to escape, was seen approaching.

He advanced with an imperturbable air of self-possession, and cried in a clear, ringing voice :

"What is all this excitement about? For whom or for what are you looking?"

"Monsieur," replied the coachman, abashed by his cool and masterful manner, "we thought there was a thief ; we never imagined it could be *you*."

"And whether it was me or another, how had you

the insolence to disobey your mistress? Be gone, all of you!"

His voice sounded like the crack of a whip; the servants, confounded with fear and astonishment, turned without a murmur to obey him.

"Did I not tell you it was a false alarm?" Sophie called after them angrily as they slunk away in the darkness, taking her cue from her lover.

But the danger was only half averted; there remained the husband of the Marquise to be confronted and hoodwinked. Never more resourceful than when his situation was most perilous, Mirabeau awoke the admiration of the retreating suspicion by what was a veritable master-stroke of audacity.

"Sage," he said calmly to the valet of the Marquis de Monnier, "take me at once to your master." And cautioning Sophie by a glance to be guided entirely by him, he offered her his arm and followed the valet, who was completely *foudroyé* by the command, back to the house.

There now began one of those amazing scenes that seem only possible on the stage, and in the adaptation of which to real life Mirabeau was a past-master. As he entered the house, beholding the Marquis de Monnier, who, attracted by the noise in his garden, was descending the stairs to discover the cause, he rushed forward and embraced him.

"Ah, M. de Monnier," he said gaily, "such an adventure! Would you believe it?—your servants took me for a thief!"

"It was but natural," replied the old man, at once surprised and delighted at the sight of his visitor. "I thought you in Switzerland. Why have you come back, and like this?"

"That I would rather tell you in privacy," said Mirabeau, glancing significantly at the servants, who stood looking on in amazed curiosity.

M. de Monnier dismissed them with a wave of the hand.

"Stay," said Mirabeau to him. "I beg of you to command them to be silent. The precaution is absolutely necessary for my safety, as you will perceive when I give you the details of my visit."

The Marquis de Monnier did as he was requested, adding a threat of dismissal to any one who should breathe of the presence of the Comte de Mirabeau in Pontarlier.

When the servants, whom stupefaction rendered speechless, had withdrawn, Mirabeau told the Marquis a detailed and plausible story.

"I am on my way from Berne to Paris," he said, "to throw myself on the mercy of the Comte de Saint-Germain. Not wishing to pass without seeing you and once again thanking you for all your kindness, I had arranged to reach Pontarlier at night. In order that I should not be seen by any one, I tried to effect an entrance into your garden when I thought your servants were at supper. Chance, however, caused one of them to see me, who, believing me to be a thief, gave the alarm. That is why I implore you to insist on their silence. If it were known that I had been here, M. de Saint-Mauris would have me pursued and overtaken before I could reach Paris."

"It is very rash, this journey of yours to Paris," said the unsuspicious old man. "It is putting your head in the lion's mouth. Suppose your father gets wind of your presence?"

Mirabeau drew from his pocket a letter.

"This," he said, with a *sangfroid* that might have deceived the devil himself, "is from my father, approving of my journey." And he proceeded to read the letter, the contents of which he composed on the spot to conform with his story.

"Well, I wish you success," said M. de Monnier,

patting him on the shoulder when he had finished. And carried away by his infatuation, the cuckold even offered Mirabeau money to defray the expense of the journey!

To complete the farcical absurdity of this scene, which, if inserted in a comedy, would have made all Paris laugh, the ever-needy lover matched the offer, the sole of its kind ever made by the miserly husband of his mistress, with a refusal.

"To lie is a legitimate ruse of the game," he said to himself, as, urged by his characteristic chivalry to save the honour, so to speak, of his dishonour, he trampled upon the temptation to accept the money, of which he was sorely in want; "but to betray hospitality, to accept the succour of a benefactor in order to deceive him, would be a horrible perfidy, and remorse ever after would never cease to poison all my pleasure."

Having thus boldly extricated himself and Sophie from the most delicate and dangerous of situations, he bade adieu to the Marquis de Monnier, who saw him depart for Paris, as he thought, without the shadow of a suspicion, and returned to his hiding-place to await a more opportune occasion of flight.

Sophie accompanied him as far as the door.

"I have a presentiment," she said sadly, as, concealed by a shadow, he held her for an indescribable instant in his arms, "that the gods are against us, that we shall never succeed in escaping."

"Courage, my goddess!" he whispered passionately. "I, too, have a presentiment, and it is that I shall never be caught. Remember, I am always near you and shall never quit you."

CHAPTER IX

THE PURSUIT

FOR Mirabeau to remain indefinitely in Pontarlier, skilfully as he had hitherto managed to cover his tracks, was out of the question. From the first, the possibility that he had never left the town at all had occurred to many, and at any moment an accident might betray his presence. The conviction that he was in communication with the Marquise de Monnier kept Saint-Mauris on the *qui vive*, and he publicly announced his intention to continue to do all in his power to capture the fugitive until he had positive proof of his complete disappearance from the neighbourhood.

These reasons had made it evident to Sophie that the longer her elopement was delayed the more difficult it would become. To Mirabeau the danger they ran only added to the excitement of the situation; his passion courted adventure. But Sophie was by nature more prudent, more cunning. Warned by the fatality that had frustrated their attempt to escape, she abandoned of her own accord the romantic design of fleeing in company with her lover, and now urged upon him the absolute necessity of their leaving Pontarlier separately and with an interval of some days between their departure.

"During the five years of my marriage," she said, "I have never once seen my parents. I propose that I suggest to M. de Monnier to consent to my paying

them a visit. He is not likely to refuse, and you can then follow me to Dijon, from where we can easily and safely flee together."

Mirabeau readily agreed to this project, as he would have done to anything she might have suggested. But circumstances, which at every stage of this amour spiced it with fresh and unexpected sensations, arose to blight, while they appeared to further, the success of the scheme.

The Marquis de Monnier's daughter, whom since the scandal that had culminated in her marriage with Valdahon he had ceased to recognise, having nothing to lose and everything to gain by exciting the hostility of her father against his wife, informed him by letter of what not only Pontarlier but the whole province was now talking about. At first the infatuated old man, suspicious of the source of this news, refused to give it credence. It disturbed him, however, none the less, and the rage into which it finally threw him when it was corroborated by those whom his uneasiness led him to question, paved the way, as Madame de Valdahon had intended, to a reconciliation, on which her inheritance of his fortune depended.

Suspicions that cannot be proved assume and maintain all the importance of established facts, and the Marquis de Monnier's, when they were at last excited, were the more bitter for being belated. Charged with her guilt, Sophie, fully alive to the danger she ran of never again seeing her lover, defended herself with an ingenuity and boldness worthy of Mirabeau himself. Cunningly relying on the pretended righteousness of her indignation, she fiercely asserted her innocence and attributed the rumours concerning her to the malice of Madame de Valdahon and the resentment of Saint-Mauris, whose perfidious attempts to seduce her she now exposed.

"That you should dare to credit their accusations,"

she cried violently, "is an intolerable insult to me. If you have no care for your honour, I at least have for mine, and at the pass to which things have come between us, I insist on returning to my parents!"

But this haughty bluff only incensed the Marquis the more against his wife. The exposure of all the treachery of which he had been so long the unconscious dupe made him now suspicious of everybody and everything. He saw in her demand a subtle attempt to join her lover. Unable to avenge himself on Mirabeau, he did not in his exasperation hesitate to publish, with all the indifference of an aristocrat to the shame of scandal, the baseness of Saint-Mauris, and to subject his wife to the humiliation of confinement to her room and the espionage of her servants.

Sophie, with Mirabeau and flight ever in her thoughts, saw in this treatment the means to her end. Such a situation she knew could not continue long, and she was firmly resolved that her submission should only be bought on her own terms.

"Since you are determined to give me a lover," she never ceased cunningly to rage, "and to conceal him in Pontarlier, you can have no reason to refuse my request to be allowed to go to my parents, especially as your knowledge of them assures you that I shall have no greater liberty there than here!"

The news of what was happening in Pontarlier profoundly agitated Sophie's relations in Dijon, whose puritanical respectability dreaded nothing so much as a scandal, of which their consciences told them that the cause might easily be attributed to themselves.

"M. de Monnier is an old fool," said Madame de Ruffey to her husband; "we had better insist on his allowing Sophie to come back to us for a time. We are more likely to correct her conduct than he is."

So the Marquis de Monnier, attacked on the one hand by his wife and on the other by his wife's family,

for the sake of peace finally consented to permit Sophie to go to Dijon.

"You can rely on us," wrote Madame de Ruffey, "that she shall have no communication with the Comte de Mirabeau. But to guard against a possible attempt to abduct her *en route*, of which this infamous debauchee is quite capable, I advise you to send her under the care of a strong escort."

The exasperated husband acted on this advice, and ten days after her previous unsuccessful attempt at flight the Marquise de Monnier arrived at Dijon. Four days later Mirabeau, who during this time had been kept informed in his place of hiding of what was transpiring, followed her.

But the conditions under which Sophie had succeeded in getting away from Pontarlier only served to put obstacles in the way of escaping from Dijon that Mirabeau's vanity and daring rendered insurmountable. For on the very night of his arrival, learning that M. de Montherot, the Grand Provost of Burgundy, was giving a ball at which the cream of Dijon society would be present, he persuaded an acquaintance to whom he had been recommended by those who had concealed him in Pontarlier, and who was the only person in the town aware of his identity, to procure him an invitation. Having little doubt that Sophie would attend this function, he hoped by attending it himself to inform her of his arrival, and to make use of the opportunity to concoct a plan for immediate flight. As he was quite unknown in Dijon, he considered that a change of name was all that was necessary to secure him from detection, and in his love of ostentation he had himself presented as the Marquis de Lancefoudras.

At the sound of a name at once so formidable and unfamiliar all eyes were fixed upon him ; and Sophie, who had come to the ball with her mother, taken completely by surprise, was unable to conceal her

emotion on recognising her lover under his fantastic incognito.

"None but the Comte de Mirabeau could be so ugly," mused Madame de Ruffey, whose suspicions were aroused.

A quadrille in which the Marquis de Lancefoudras danced *vis-à-vis* to Sophie confirmed them, and as soon as the dance was over the vigilant mother took her daughter away from the ball. Their sudden departure apprised Mirabeau that his incognito had been discovered. But he had not left a hiding-place in Pontarlier merely to find another in Dijon ; his capacity for prudence was exhausted, and he impulsively determined to face the danger.

"As I foresee that I shall need friends in this town," he muttered to himself, "I can do no better than begin by making one of M. de Montherot. Let Madame de Ruffey do her worst, I shall be more than a match for her!"

The next morning M. de Montherot received a letter from Madame de Ruffey informing him that the Marquis de Lancefoudras was none other than the Comte de Mirabeau, and that as Grand Provost it was his duty to arrest him at once and send him back to Joux. But M. de Montherot was gifted with a generous nature, and his strange guest of the previous night had created a most favourable impression on him. He sent a subordinate to request the Marquis de Lancefoudras to come to him. Mirabeau went, and in a few minutes completely conquered the sympathies of the Grand Provost.

"It is true," he said with the indescribable charm that very seldom failed to captivate those on whom he exercised it, "I am the unfortunate and persecuted Comte de Mirabeau, of whom so much ill has been said. I leave it to your humanity, M. de Montherot, to decide whether I am the man I have been described to you. But I entreat you, not so much on my own account as

on that of Madame de Monnier, not to reveal my identity, for if you arrest me it will consummate her ruin in the eyes of her husband."

"Give me your word of honour, M. le Comte," was the chivalrous reply, "that you will not attempt to abduct the Marquise from her parents, and you shall retain your liberty."

To refuse such a request under the circumstances was impossible, and thus a second time the flight of the lovers was foiled.

The de Ruffeys, however, refused to accept M. de Montherot's assurance of Mirabeau's honour as a guarantee against the danger they so much dreaded. Unable to effect Mirabeau's arrest or to drive him out of Dijon, where they had most unwisely allowed their terror and animosity to betray his presence, thereby creating the scandal they wished to avoid, they subjected Sophie to the most rigorous confinement. She quickly discovered that in coming from Pontarlier to Dijon she had fallen from the frying-pan into the fire. Instead of trying to reconcile her daughter to her husband by the gentlest persuasion, Madame de Ruffey compelled her to submit to a pitiless inquisition, and puritanically preached to her of the duty of a wife, which according to her reduced itself to passive obedience to her lord and master. Her father refused to see her, lest his anger should drive him to violence. Her married sister tried to intimidate her with the fear of God and hell fire ; her brothers never addressed her save in a tone of cold sarcasm. Pens and paper were forbidden her, lest she should correspond with her lover, and knowing the daring and cunning of which he was capable, her parents even went to the length of having the very house watched as if it were threatened by robbers.

Nevertheless, in spite of all their threats, in spite of all their precautions, the wretched woman, in whom flight at all costs, under any conditions, had now become a fixed

idea, found the means to communicate with Mirabeau. The discovery goaded the de Ruffeys to that pitch of exasperation at which morality becomes criminal. They affected to believe Sophie was mad, but as her confinement in an asylum would have removed her from their hands, they sent her to the convent in Dijon, of which her eldest sister was the canoness. Here the cruelty with which she was persecuted reached its limit. Shut up all day in a cell, she was forced to pass the night in the same room with her sister, in whom the inflexible resolution of all the de Ruffeys was centred. In the history of the convent at Dijon, as in that of probably every other in France, there had been midnight assignations and elopements, and every night on going to bed Sophie's foot was tied by a ribbon to the arm of the wary canoness, who thus in her very sleep kept a watch, so to speak, on her sister !

But the love which laughs at locksmiths is not to be baffled by a Gordian knot, any more than Alexander. One bitter winter's night Mirabeau and Sophie met at the bottom of the convent garden. It was the first time they had seen one another since M. de Montherot's ball, the first time they had been alone together since Mirabeau had lain hidden in a closet in Sophie's bedroom at Pontarlier.

"Oh !" she sighed, as she felt his arms around her once more and the hot rain of his kisses on her face, "now I know my parents have not done all the harm they wished. They have not deprived me of your love."

"They cannot, Sophie," he returned; "I am yours, and yours only."

The thought of flight, which like some uneasy spirit had haunted her mind for weeks, banished by the bliss of meeting him again, was recalled by the sight of the ladder by which he entered the convent garden. With a cry she tore herself from his arms and began to mount the rungs.

"Come," she pleaded passionately, halting in her ascent and turning towards him, "let us be off! To live apart from you is to die a thousand deaths every day. After what has happened there is no receding; let us then make haste to render each other happy! My health, for I am dying here; your own, for you would soon follow me; the need we have of each other—everything requires it! What matters it whether we have money or not? You once told me that you would become a teacher of languages, music, painting. Surely you have the same idea still? And what will I not do, beloved? I will work in a shop or as a maid, I will do anything, provided we are together. Oh, Gabriel! there is nothing I would not do to be near you. I can endure my sufferings no longer; I cannot live without you. Oh, take me—take me to-night! Why do you hesitate? Let us go or let me die!"

In the intensity of her passion it never occurred to her that she could not flee clad in a nightdress. Nor did it to Mirabeau. Had flight been possible, he would, in his agitation of body and soul, have carried her off though she were naked. But, unmanned by her anguish, burning with love and indignation, there still remained to him a remnant of reason.

"Oh, Sophie," he said sadly, "have you forgotten that my honour is pledged to M. de Montherot?"

"Honour!" she echoed wildly, slipping from the ladder to the snow-covered ground; "then what is to become of me?"

In an instant she was once more clasped madly in his arms. Forced to choose between his love and his honour, he would have yielded to the former through inability to withstand it had she not regained the mastery of her reason.

"True," she said, "I had forgotten. Let us consider what is to be done."

It was decided that she should insist on returning to

her husband, while he would submit of his own accord to the order of arrest which Montherot had received from Versailles and had generously sent back again with a strong plea for pardon.

"In prison," he told her, "the powers that be will be more disposed to listen to M. de Montherot, who has immense influence. If they will not grant me a pardon, I shall escape and abduct you from M. de Monnier. If, on the contrary, I am freed, I shall go abroad and offer my sword to a foreign king and come back for you. In any case, I shall never rest till we are united never to part again. The third time we try to escape we shall succeed."

Fortified by her faith in him, of which the warmth of the demonstration of his passion left not a shadow of doubt, Sophie yielded.

"Mind," she said, as she left him to return, bitten to the bone with cold, to her bed beside the terrible canoness, "if you do not write to me, if I do not hear from you, I will no longer be accountable for anything. Your love is my only treasure, all I value in the world. Whatever snares are laid for me I shall escape them. Even were I to read in your own handwriting that you no longer loved me, though it were sealed with our private motto, I should consider it a forgery, so certain am I of you! But let us meet soon or let me die. At the thought that I may have to wait years my heart fails me. I am suffering too much to endure it long. Make haste, beloved!"

The next morning their tracks in the snow in the garden betrayed their romantic meeting. The de Ruffeys, mortified by the failure of their attempt to "reform" Sophie, talked in the desperation of their anger of placing her in a house of correction for fallen women, but M. de Monnier had to be consulted; it was he, not they, who was, after all, her legal guardian. Appealed to by his wife to be allowed to return to him,

he consented, and the objections of the de Ruffeys to the departure were overcome, as Mirabeau had surmised, by the news of his arrest and imprisonment in the Château de Dijon.

"Now that this scoundrel is under lock and key here," they argued, "she is safer with her husband."

Three weeks had elapsed since Sophie had left Pontarlier; five months were to pass before she saw again the man for love of whom she was willingly sacrificing her reputation.

"Be sure," said the Marquis de Mirabeau to Madame de Pailly, when informed that his son had followed the Marquise de Monnier to Dijon, "he will finish by weaving the rope to hang himself with or imprisonment for life, which I for one shall not regret."

The delay, if not the refusal, of M. de Montherot to arrest this fugitive, whose liberty was so dangerous to the peace of families so important as those of de Mirabeau, de Monnier, and de Ruffey, astonished and exasperated the Friend of Men. He travelled post from Bignon to Paris to demand of the Minister of War an order compelling the Grand Provost to do his duty. This order had in due course arrived at Dijon, but M. de Montherot had dared to delay its execution until he had himself appealed to Versailles on behalf of his *protégé*. Indeed, so kind and temperate was the treatment that Mirabeau received from the Grand Provost, and so deep was the impression it made upon his susceptible nature, that had Sophie experienced the same from her kindred, it is highly probable that the flame of their passions, no longer fed by persecution and opposition, might have died down into one of those commonplace and "decent" arrangements to which eighteenth century society gave the *cachet* of respectability.

But nothing was more intolerable to the Marquis de Mirabeau than outside interference with what he considered his private affairs. He always bitterly resented appeals for mercy from the governors of the fortresses in which his son was confined. He regarded them as public and hostile criticism that questioned the sincerity of his boasted friendship for humanity and sought to cover it with odium. When, therefore, he learnt that Mirabeau had voluntarily surrendered and was lying in the Château de Dijon, he made haste to secure his removal to some other prison where the severity of the discipline might reasonably be depended on. The proof he now had of what might be expected of the Comte de Saint-Mauris in this respect predisposed him in favour of a return to Joux; but out of consideration for the feelings of the de Ruffeys and M. de Monnier, on whose combined influence he counted to defeat that of the Grand Provost, he consented to apply for some fortress remote from Burgundy.

This powerful coalition of interests, however, had another equally determined to reckon with. To plead in his behalf at Versailles, Mirabeau had not only M. de Montherot, but the Governor of the Château de Dijon, M. de Changey, who was now immediately responsible for his safety; Madame de Changey, a beautiful and cunning *intrigante*, and sworn enemy of the de Ruffeys; not to speak of his mother, the Marquise de Mirabeau, in whom her husband had a deadly and utterly unprincipled enemy.

Few episodes in Mirabeau's life manifested his wonderful powers of fascination more markedly than the devotion he inspired in M. de Montherot and the de Changeys, who in defending him and failing ran the risk of forfeiting their posts. From the first, perhaps, the failure of his friends was a foregone conclusion; they managed, however, to prolong the struggle for

two months, and in the end to cheat his enemies out of the reward of victory. At one time it seemed as if they must win, for they succeeded in obtaining from Versailles the appointment of a commission to report on the subject of their *protégé's* imprisonment. This report was favourable to Mirabeau, and the commissioners recommended that he should be released on the condition that he left the country, as he had expressed a desire to do. Notwithstanding so seemingly certain an indication of success the Minister of War yielded to the urgent and importunate demands of the Marquis de Mirabeau, and his unlucky son would have been doomed to the strictest confinement had it not been for Malesherbes.

While his friends had been working in his behalf Mirabeau himself had been active. Knowing the friendly relations that had long existed between the Keeper of the Seals and his father, he had addressed a passionate prayer for help to the Minister. From no member of the King's Council, one would have thought, was he less likely to receive assistance. No man in France, unless it were the Friend of Men, had advocated nobler ideals than Malesherbes—none had denounced more courageously than these two the abuses of despotism of which the *lettre de cachet* was the chief. And yet no men in France had demanded and obtained more of these arbitrary orders of imprisonment than the one, or granted and signed more than the other. But the Keeper of the Seals had a conscience, which the "Master" of the Economists lacked, and it at last compelled him to resign his office. It was on the eve of his retirement that Mirabeau's appeal reached him, and the natural nobility of his character prompted him, on relinquishing the power which he had been forced to use in defiance of all his principles, to perform a last act of compassion in the hope that it might make amends for some of the suffering he had caused.

"It is quite natural," he replied, "for a man to try to obtain his release. I sympathise with you, but I cannot help you or be of any further service to you, for I am on the point of resigning from the ministry. I will, however, inform you that your case is hopeless, and were I in your place I should flee."

Such a hint was not to be disdained. In order that neither M. de Montherot nor M. de Changey should be accused of collusion in his flight, it was agreed that he should make an attempt which should be frustrated. This was done, and one night a week later a door was conveniently left open through which he vanished.

The news of his escape from the Château de Dijon caused the de Ruffeys the greatest mortification and alarm. One of Sophie's brothers, accompanied by his sister, the canoness, at once started for Pontarlier to bring her back to Dijon. But the Marquis de Monnier resented their interference as a sign that they regarded him, on account of his eighty years, as an imbecile incapable of managing his own affairs. He absolutely refused to part with his wife, and the altercation that ensued led to his wife's brother haughtily returning to Dijon. The canoness, however, was wilier, and seeing that her aged brother-in-law was determined, she pleaded to be allowed to remain in his house and help guard his wife. Surveillance and humiliation, however, had ceased to have terrors for Sophie.

"Gabriel has escaped at last," she said to herself; "all France cannot keep him from me now!" And, full of hope and courage, she waited for his coming.

Nor did the Marquis de Mirabeau any more than the de Ruffeys let the grass grow under his feet.

"I have been well served by my friends," he wrote his brother the Bailli. "I lost not a moment, and I may even say that I was served with the orders I demanded at a moment's notice. I have obtained Mont Saint-Michel instead of Doullens. It is one of the strongest

prisons in France, because it is almost entirely surrounded by quicksands, in which the very guides are often swallowed up. I have, too, employed a detective to pursue the scoundrel, a man unequalled for this sort of thing in all Europe. He will follow him, too, over Europe, and seize him in any country in which he may find him, for he is furnished with the most urgent orders to all foreign Courts and to all our ambassadors. You may imagine the terrible expense to which I am put; nevertheless at all costs he must be captured!"

It was this expense, which was, however, shared by the de Ruffeys and later by de Monnier, that made the Marquis' vengeance so terrible when finally the sleuth-hounds of the police tracked his son to his hiding-place.

In the meantime they had an exhausting and exciting run for their money. From Dijon, Mirabeau fled to Verrières, a little village in Switzerland, only a few miles from Pontarlier, to find, owing to the *détour* he had been compelled to take, that the de Ruffeys had arrived there before him. To cheat the vigilance that guarded Sophie time was necessary, and to remain in Verrières was exceedingly dangerous. Warned by a friend that Saint-Mauris, advised of his vicinity, was about to apprehend him, he vanished across the Alps into Italy. From Turin he wrote to Madame de Cabris, with whom he had all along been in correspondence and on whom he knew he could count. Adventure was the element in which Madame de Cabris lived; from the moment she had been informed of the *liaison* of her brother and the Marquise de Monnier she had urged them to elope.

"It is only *valets de chambre* who think of consequences," she said. "Happiness is worth any sacrifice. Take your life boldly into your own hands; *be* yourself!"

On this principle, while Mirabeau was in the Château de Dijon, she had been acting herself. After the Mouans affair, for which everybody held her responsible, her

position in Grasse, already unpleasant, became unendurable. Under the pretence of health, but in reality to seek a stage on which she would have greater scope to "be herself," she announced to her docile and half-mad husband her intention of going to Lyons, whither immediately after her arrival she was followed by her lover, Briançon. It was in these circumstances that her brother's appeal for help reached her. It met with an instant response, and writing to him to meet her in Geneva, she departed from Lyons on horseback, armed, and clad in men's clothes, with Briançon.

"Watch Madame de Cabris," wrote the Marquis to Detective Brugnière, when that old sleuth-hound lost the scent of the fox he was chasing at Verrières.

To follow the track of Madame de Cabris and Briançon was no easy matter, but Brugnière, who "had not his equal in all Europe," picked up the scent. Then began a chase which, for the fleetness and cunning of the pursuit and the patient persistency of the pursuer, acquired renown in the police world.

Madame de Cabris, aware that she was followed, was now in her element, and excitement sharpened her wits. Reaching Geneva with Brugnière at her heels, she finds her brother waiting for her. They have not a moment to lose; Brugnière, arriving the next day, learns that people answering to the description of those he seeks have gone in the direction of Thonon, in Savoy. To Thonon then without delay. But the wily fugitives return to Geneva by a by-path in the mountains, and at Thonon Brugnière loses the scent, and finds it after three days of incredible fatigue only to lose it again at Geneva. Here Madame de Cabris, who is the spirit of adventure, the genius of cunning, doffs her male attire, and bidding Briançon and Mirabeau meet her in Lyons by a circuitous route in the mountains, she returns there herself, travelling as Mademoiselle Raucour of the Comédie Française, to whom she is said to bear a striking resemblance

and who is known to be fleeing on her own account from importunate creditors. The bewildered Brugnière, after some delay, finds a clue and pursues the wrong Mademoiselle Raucour!

Mirabeau and Briançon in the meantime reach the Rhone and hire a boat to take them to Lyons. But Briançon, cashiered officer, card-cheat, and adventurer, for all that a Madame de Cabris can see in him, is not a man that a proud and chivalrous Comte de Mirabeau can travel with long without quarrelling. On the voyage down the Rhone their differences cause them to part in fury.

"He behaved like a brigand," wrote Mirabeau afterwards to Madame du Saillant, who looked at this chase from afar sympathetically. "He insulted our boatmen, threw stones at them, and fired his pistol twice at one of them, whom Providence permitted that he should miss. What a business it would have been had he killed him!"

Separately they reach Lyons, where the quarrel is patched up by Madame de Cabris, who hands her brother a note from Sophie, whom anxiety had rendered desperate again.

"Are you never coming?" she wrote. "Come but for a moment, at least, and let me yield my last breath with your hand on my heart and swearing to you that I lived only for you!"

"Courage," he replied; "I am coming, or shall die in the attempt!"

But how shall he reach her? Brugnière is once more on the scent, stalking him like fate. Briançon has a tiny property at Lorgues, in Provence, the remains of the fortune he has gambled away, and there, on Madame de Cabris' advice, Briançon undertakes to hide him. They have scarcely arrived when Brugnière appears. But Mirabeau is fleet of foot, and, driven desperate, determines to be guided by his own counsel. From Lorgues, with Brugnière's hand all but on him, he makes straight for

Verrières. Frightened by the sight of the terrible Brugnière, who inspires him with a sense of his own danger in conniving at the escape of a fugitive from justice, Briançon plays the traitor.

"He has gone to Verrières," he said; "if you follow him you will yet be in time to capture him and prevent him from abducting his mistress."

But Brugnière knows the fellow for a knave and liar, and how shall he believe him when at last he speaks the truth? Fatigued and discouraged, he wastes valuable time, wanders off doubtfully towards Nice, and falls ill on the road of a "swelling in the legs."

In the meantime Mirabeau reached Verrières. Five months had now passed since he left Dijon, and the Marquis de Monnier, distracted by the canoness, who, having ensconced herself in his house, took upon herself to manage the establishment, had finally ordered her to be gone. Sophie consequently was less strictly watched, and when one summer night she received the signal she had begun to despair of, she slipped from a window into the garden, scaled the wall, and was off.

"Stay," said Mirabeau, holding her in his arms. "You are going to a life of hardships and disgrace. Suppose you should live to repent this night? It is not too late for you to return."

"I am incapable of repentance," was the passionate reply. "I implore you, I command you to carry me off. I should prefer dying a felon's death on the scaffold to returning to my husband. If you do not take me now I shall poison myself. Your love raises me in my own esteem and purifies me!"

CHAPTER X

CAPTURE

IN no state of society is the standard of morality so lax that there is not a limit at which public opinion draws the line. In the eighteenth century adultery was regarded as a matter of course, and treated not only with tolerance, but with the greatest respect—always providing that the "arrangement" was "decent." Instances of this are so numerous and well-known that to cite one would be futile. There was, however, an unwritten and merciless law that inflicted a dire vengeance on those who dared to outrage this convention. Had women possessed the same rights in the eye of the law as men, the scandal caused by the violent protest of the Marquise de Mirabeau against the relation of her husband with Madame de Pailly would have brought the latter to a penitentiary and have effected the complete social ostracism of the former, "Master" of the Economists though he was.

However leniently private opinion might have been inclined to view the elopement of Mirabeau and Sophie, the Revolution was still far too distant for public opinion to feel other than outraged. Society did not stop for one moment to question the causes or motives that had led to so shocking an act, it never dreamt of seeking the least excuse for the culprits, and for all the sentimentality of Jean Jacques Rousseau in which it was steeped, it heard with cold approval the terrible sentence pronounced

upon the guilty fugitives by the court of Pontarlier, to which the injured and enraged Marquis de Monnier at once appealed for redress.

"We," said the Judge, "declare Gabriel Honoré de Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau, who is charged with the crime of the forcible abduction and seduction of Sophie de Ruffey, Marquise de Monnier, to be convicted of the same, and we condemn him to pay a fine of five livres to the King and forty thousand livres as compensation to the Marquis de Monnier, also to lose all civil and political rights and to be beheaded, which shall be executed in effigy on a portrait.

"We also declare Sophie de Ruffey, Marquise de Monnier, to have aided and abetted this crime, and we condemn her to pay a fine of ten livres to the King and to be confined during the rest of her natural life in the penitentiary for prostitutes at Besançon, there to be shaved and degraded like the females of that community, and further to forfeit all her rights of dower and inheritance and the other advantages of her rank and marriage."

Owing to the delays of the law, nine months elapsed before this decree was uttered, but its shadow fell upon them from the moment of their flight. They were perfectly well aware of the consequences of what they were doing. From the night on which their passion was twin-born at the ball in honour of the coronation of Louis XVI. they had known whither it must lead unless strangled at its birth. For them there could be no "decent arrangement," even though the Monnier-Mirabeau-Ruffey dragon was willing to consent, even though their hearts had never been bruised and their natures starved. Loving, it was not in either Mirabeau or Sophie to have loved conventionally. Of love they demanded all its passion, all its romance, all its terror, all its sin; all the pomps and parade of its misery, all the sweetness of its suffering. They knew the price of what they asked, and having paid it, deemed it cheap.

"How unhappy would our existence have been in Amsterdam had we been merely common lovers!" wrote Sophie when even such love as hers might have been expected to cry out against its cost.

"Le jeu vaut la chandelle!" exclaimed Mirabeau, when he believed himself to be dying in his dungeon at Vincennes, whither his love led him.

For them it was not enough to be happy, they wished to be *too* happy.

Beyond the pale of eighteenth century society, these two passionate outcasts reached Amsterdam, broken, blighted, excommunicated—but together at last! It was precisely twenty-seven years, in the year of Mirabeau's birth, since his uncle the Chevalier had arrived in the same city, and under similar circumstances, with Mademoiselle Navarre. Sophie was barely two-and-twenty. They found a mean lodging over the shop of a tailor and began the struggle for existence—a dire struggle with poverty beatified by love.

They were literally penniless. Mirabeau's funds, supplied by his mother, were exhausted in fleeing from Brugnière, and Sophie, in spite of the malice of public rumours which accused her of having pillaged her husband's safe before leaving, had not brought with her a single jewel. To live, Mirabeau was obliged to seek employment, and having a talent for writing, it was to literature he turned. Holland was then a centre of literary activity; there were numerous publishers to choose from before the round of the lot was made, and none of them seemed to these two inexperienced and romantic lovers, who felt as if they had stepped out of the pages of the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, more likely to interest himself in them than Rey, famous as the publisher of the immortal Rousseau.

To Rey, then, Mirabeau addressed the following letter, every line of which breathed the inexperience of the tyro in literature pricked by ambition, confidence, pride, and want:

"SIR,—A series of misfortunes which it would be useless to relate to you have forced me to leave my country. I am the anonymous author of the *Essay on Despotism* a book of which you have doubtless heard and probably read, which, published in Neufchâtel, went through two editions in six weeks, and when known in France caused too great a sensation for my tranquillity. It will give you an idea of my style. I am also a master of several languages, I work quickly, and am greatly in need of employment. Try then, sir, to employ me in any way. We will discuss payment when you have seen what I am capable of. I may tell you that I am a man of quality and shall one day inherit an income of one hundred thousand francs. At present I prefer to sign myself,

"COMTE DE SAINT-MATHIEU."

Rey was a clever and unscrupulous man who had made a fortune by discovering and exploiting genius. The great Rousseau himself, in the days of his literary nonage, had suffered much from his cunning. The fame of the *Essay on Despotism* was sufficient to save the Comte de Saint-Mathieu's pathetic and extraordinary letter from the contemptuous silence with which it would otherwise have been received. Rey returned a favourable reply, bidding his correspondent to call upon him, and the interview resulted in employment for Mirabeau at a miserable wage. Most men would have succumbed to the strain of the sweated hack-work and poverty that he had now to endure. But in his veins flowed the unconquerable blood of the Riquetis, and he had Sophie at his side. His energy was so prodigious, his incentive so great, that he earned sometimes as much as a louis a day!

Brought up in the lap of luxury, Sophie accepted the terrible privations to which she was unaccustomed without a murmur. Never had she been so happy, so courageous, so light-hearted.

"I can never forget the happiness you have given me," was a phrase constantly on her lips.

Her one thought, the motive of her life, was to make him equally happy. She breathed around him perpetually an atmosphere of tenderness and gentleness; she was naïve and gay as a child, and when occasion demanded strong, resolute, brave, always comforting and inspiring. And he needed to be comforted and inspired —how much, only those who have tasted the anguish of the struggle of the literary life with necessity can appreciate. With such a wealth of passion to draw from she could not but succeed in what she undertook.

"If I had not found in her a Venus," wrote Mirabeau to his sister, Madame du Saillant, "I should have believed I had seen Juno. '*O dea certe!*' as Virgil says. She belongs to the caste of the gods!"

For nine months this life lasted, heroic, beatific, epic, till one day Brugnière flung his shadow across it.

At first the Marquis de Monnier had not been disposed to take any action against his wife and her lover. Her flight appeared to have awakened in him a sort of belated senile affection for her, which manifested itself during the remaining six or seven years of his life in futile attempts at reconciliation. Indeed, at the very moment when the court of Pontarlier was passing its terrible sentence on Sophie, her husband, whose meanness was proverbial, secretly sent his valet to Amsterdam to offer her the financial assistance of which he had heard she was so much in need. But Madame de Valdahon, having succeeded in effecting a reconciliation with her father, was determined by any and every means to acquire an absolute ascendancy over him. It was to her advantage to complete the ruin of her stepmother, and she worked with a will to attain her end, assisted by the feeble health of her father, whom age and trouble had broken. His appeal to the courts to redress his wrongs was entirely inspired by his daughter.

Having already faced one scandal, Madame de Valdahon did not dread another, especially as she hoped to fish her

father's fortune out of it. Nor was scandal a deterrent to the Marquis de Mirabeau in *his* determination to capture his son; he had breathed no other atmosphere for the last thirty years. The motives that guided Madame de Valdahon and the Marquis de Mirabeau can at least be understood; but what shall be said for the action of the de Ruffeys, to whom scandal was anathema? Known throughout Burgundy for the austerity of their principles and the puritanical severity of their lives, they were a sort of protest to the prevailing degeneracy of the times. It was for this very reason that their indignation was so unbounded. The Marquise de Monnier was *their* daughter, *their* sister: it was *they* who had educated her and formed her; it was *they* who had married her into what even convention knew to be temptation. Her crime traced itself back to them, reproaching, mocking, accusing; the wound it inflicted on their vanity was intolerable: to heal it there was but one remedy, and that was to plunge their respectable and moral consciences into scandal as if into a purifying fire.

Accordingly Madame de Ruffey decided to imitate the Marquis de Mirabeau and have her daughter pursued. Detective Brugnière had now quite recovered from his "swelling in the legs," caused by the chase Mirabeau had led him, and as his reputation as the "most unrivalled detective in Europe" was somewhat dimmed by the notoriety of his recent failure, Madame de Ruffey cunningly surmised that his anxiety to redeem it would enhance his value while cheapening his price. Nor was she deceived. Brugnière agreed to discover the whereabouts of the Marquise de Monnier and capture her by force or stealth for the sum of one hundred louis, payment to be deferred till he had successfully accomplished his work. Madame de Ruffey also wrote to the Marquis de Mirabeau urging him to take advantage of the same opportunity to effect the capture of his son.

"It is not right," she said, "that, having ruined my

daughter and broken up the peace of two families, he should go unpunished. I have employed Brugnière to search out and arrest Sophie ; let him make one job of it and seize her ravisher at the same time."

But the Marquis had just expended eighteen thousand francs in a fruitless endeavour to arrest his son, and his natural avarice, coupled with the ruinous charges of his endless lawsuit with his wife, for once curbed his desire for revenge.

"I agree, madame," he replied, "with all you say, but I have already incurred too much expense in this business ; I can go no further. Besides, Brugnière is a vile knave and cheat, on whom no reliance is to be placed."

In this decision, to which, entirely against his inclination, he was forced by the crippled state of his finances, he was supported by the Duc de Nivernais and Madame de Rochefort. The interest they had taken in Mirabeau as a boy and as a youth still survived, and they strove to mitigate the implacable fury with which he was being persecuted by his unnatural father.

"What is the use," they argued cunningly, "of incurring fresh expense merely to give yourself the satisfaction of emphasising his ruin ? It is more advantageous to you to leave the scoundrel to seal his own doom, as there is now every indication of his doing. Moreover, as he is out of the kingdom, to fetch him back will not only be very expensive, but will necessitate your persuading the Government to help you. To do this you will have to haunt the ante-chambers of ministers and implore their favour like a lacquey."

But Madame de Ruffey was not the woman to take "no" for an answer. To secure the punishment of Mirabeau she was prepared to go to any lengths.

"Knowing your disinclination to solicit favours of the Court," she wrote again to the Marquis, "leave that humiliation to me. M. de Ruffey has great claims upon M. de Vergennes, the Minister for Foreign Affairs. For

our sakes he will readily consent to effect the extradition of your son from any country in which he may be found. And Brugnière will seize him for you for one hundred louis, the same sum that I have promised to pay him for my miserable daughter."

The temptation of yielding to this proposal was very great, and Madame de Pailly, who was most anxious to thwart the Duc de Nivernais and Madame de Rochefort, cunningly persuaded the Marquis to accept Madame de Ruffey's offer by reminding him that so long as his son was at large he would ever be the valuable and formidable ally of his mother.

Brugnière in the meanwhile, with a reputation to redeem, had not been long in discovering the hiding-place of the lovers. The author of the *Essay on Despotism*, destitute in a foreign country, must, he guessed, naturally turn to his pen for a living; and who would be more likely to know his whereabouts than his former publisher, Fauche of Neufchâtel? Brugnière's discovery was no sooner imparted to the Marquis than he gave the leash to his revenge.

"It was thought," he wrote with malicious glee to the Bailli in Provence, "that the gentleman had turned Turk or gone to be devoured by the Poles, and whichever of those resolutions he might have adopted would have elicited the greatest satisfaction from me. But it seems he was in Holland, subsisting by his pen. As soon as I heard it I made a bargain with Brugnière to pay him one hundred louis to capture the scoundrel and bring him *alive or dead* to Vincennes, which I have secured as his prison."

The arrival of Brugnière in Amsterdam was quickly known to Mirabeau. For himself he had no fear; the soil on which he stood would protect him from arrest: Holland was a place of refuge whose sanctity had never been defiled, and to make his safety doubly safe he had taken out papers of naturalisation. But he was alarmed

for Sophie ; unable to arrest her, might not their persecutors kidnap her ? He repeated his fears on this score to two young high-spirited French friends of his ; they fell upon Brugnière one night in a restaurant, and he would have fared badly at their hands but for Mirabeau, who dreaded nothing so much as a *fracas*, in which he might be involved and thus furnish his enemies with the advantage they sought.

But Brugnière was not to be intimidated. He waited patiently, silently, like destiny, till the French Ambassador, who had been instructed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs at Versailles "to assist Monsieur Brugnière with his advice and help," had procured from their High Mightinesses the States General of Holland a warrant to arrest and extradite the fugitives as dangerous criminals wanted in France.

The decadence of which the old civilisation of Europe was perishing had not spared Holland. It had realised its ideals. The successors of William the Silent were not ashamed to bend the knee to the golden calf, and among the wonders of the coming French Revolution the world was to behold Holland in the vanguard of feudalism. In a word, Brugnière was furnished with his warrant and the necessary police to enforce it.

Straightway he proceeded to the attic that had for nine months sheltered one of the grandest passions of the century. But Mirabeau was not without friends willing even at this juncture to rescue him. The Duc de la Vauguyon, the French Ambassador, himself sent to warn him of his danger. That very night Mirabeau determined once more to flee—this time to England, which war with France rendered the safest of asylums for him. A sloop was chartered, and, haunted with suspense, trembling at every sound on the stairs, the lovers, locked in one another's arms, waited for the darkness to conceal their departure. At the given hour two friends who were helping them to flee arrived ; one advised Mirabeau

to proceed in advance with him to the sloop, while the other escorted Sophie by another way. To this precaution Sophie objected passionately.

"The warrant is issued," was the reply. "I have the news from the Consul. There is not a moment to be lost. It is safer to go separately."

On Mirabeau's entreaty she finally consented to this arrangement, but the time wasted in convincing her was fatal. He could barely have turned the corner of the street when Brugnière and his Dutch *sbirri* stopped Sophie in the very act of following.

"In the name of the King, madame," he said, "I have orders to convey you to Sainte-Pélagie for the rest of your life." And Brugnière showed her the warrant.

At the sight of this man, at the sound of this prison, in which only the vilest of women criminals were confined, at the thought of separation from Mirabeau, she drew a dagger from her hair, but before she could stab herself Brugnière had seized her arm. In the rage, terror, and grief that convulsed her, he who was to have escorted her to the sloop slipped unperceived from the room and came rushing to Mirabeau.

"Madame de Monnier is arrested!" he panted. "As we left the room we fell into Brugnière's arms. A moment more and we should have escaped. But you at least are safe!"

"Sophie arrested!" exclaimed Mirabeau. "I must go back to her at once. It is my duty to share her fate!"

The speed with which he had made for the sloop that was to have carried him to England was not so great as that with which he returned to the attic and surrendered himself to the detective who had orders to "capture him alive or dead."

At the sight of him Brugnière's heart leapt for joy. But the detective, having redeemed his reputation, became once more a man and shed tears of pity over the misery he had caused!

But pity was the last emotion that either Madame de Ruffey or the Marquis de Mirabeau would have felt had they stood that moment in Brugnière's shoes.

"I learned yesterday," wrote the Marquis to the Bailli, "that the wretch has been immured in Vincennes and is in irons. The brave Brugnière has performed his mission like an old fox, like a most cunning trepanner. I should have preferred, had it been feasible, to deliver my prisoner into the hands of the Dutch, and have him sent to their spice colonies, where he must have spent the remainder of his life, for there is no returning from them. Besides, if he were hanged out there it would be incognito. But the reply of their High Mightinesses was that such a thing was only possible in the case of very young and unmarried people who were either vagabonds or *bourgeois*, so I have shut him up for life to prevent him from being hanged under the name of Mirabeau, which would make our ancestors rise from their graves."

At the same time this implacable father wrote as follows to Madame de Rochefort from Mont d'Or, where he was taking the cure :

"Ministers do not know whom they are plundering" —he had been describing to her the brutalised condition of the peasants of the neighbourhood—"whom they think to rule, whom with the scribbling of their stupid, cruel pens they hope to starve with impunity till some great catastrophe occurs. Such thoughts are consoling to a man who has dedicated his whole life to preach the cause of the poor and persecuted. Ah, madame, if there is not soon some treaty of peace between might and weakness, if this game of blind man's buff lasts much longer, there will of a surety be a general revolution!"

Hypocrite? Yes, but wholly unconscious of his hypocrisy. The Marquis de Mirabeau, had he but known it, was himself the symbol of all the causes of

that revolution which he predicted and deplored. The whole condition of feudal France might be summed up in the comparison between his letter to the Bailli and his letter to Madame de Rochefort, between his philosophic friendship for humanity and his despotic cruelty to his family.

CHAPTER XI

THE TO-MORROW OF A GRAND PASSION

IN accordance with the strict and explicit orders he had received, and which he had no choice but to obey, Brugnière separated his captives and conveyed them with all possible speed back to France. Before reaching Paris, however, his pity obtained for them the consoling anguish of a last farewell, or Sophie, who had firmly resolved to kill herself, must have been brought back dead.

It was now that each was to realise the price of those nine months of paradise at Amsterdam, and to pay for it in blood and tears.

The court of Pontarlier had appointed the penitentiary at Besançon as the place in which Sophie was to expiate her guilt. But as its vicinity to Dijon and Pontarlier would have perpetuated the memory of the shame she had brought upon them, the families of de Monnier and de Ruffey obtained permission to confine her instead in the prison of Sainte-Pélagie at Paris. This would have been to degrade her to the level of the lowest and most abandoned of her sex; for Sainte-Pélagie meant to women what the galleys meant to men. Sophie's pregnant condition, however, saved her from this inhuman fate; and owing to the intervention on her behalf of the French Ambassador in Holland she was placed in a less publicly shameful, but equally humiliating confinement at an institution ironically known by its

unfortunate inmates as "Nouvelle France," after the penal settlement at the antipodes.

Here, though deprived of every comfort, subjected to vexatious restraints, and forced to associate with prostitutes awaiting their confinement, Sophie was treated like a human being compared with Mirabeau at Vincennes.

If the meeting on the journey from Amsterdam to Paris had given her the courage to endure, it had all but torn the life from him. He arrived at Vincennes literally bleeding to death from a hæmorrhage brought on by the excitement of his grief. The punishment to which his father had doomed him was remorseless in its severity. Locked in a filthy dungeon for twenty-three hours out of twenty-four; deprived not only of the companionship of his kind, always so necessary to him, but of books or writing materials to lessen the horror of solitude, for months with no other clothes than those he wore on his arrival, he was left to rot for nearly four years.

Without exercise to check his tendency to corpulency, his body swelled to an enormous bulk; ulcers burst from his bloated face; his eyesight failed. Attacked with an acute inflammation of the kidneys, a disease from which he afterwards suffered excruciating agony, he was found one day lying unconscious in his dungeon. The doctor who was summoned declared that horse-exercise was necessary to preserve his life; but the permission of the Marquis had first to be obtained.

"Within the walls, then!" was his laconic and Rhadamantine reply.

It seemed as if the implacable father had resolved to crush his son into abject submission, or failing, to leave him to die entombed alive. The vengeance of this man who called himself the Friend of Men and spent his life tilting at despotism was Samoyedic in its fury. The *ancien régime*, with all the scope it gave to parental tyranny, affords no parallel to the treatment which Mirabeau at thirty received from his father. Frederick the Great was

a boy of eighteen when *his* father broke his heart on the ramparts at Custrin by the execution of his dearest friend. It was only by continuing to keep alive that Mirabeau saved the Marquis from the crime which stained the hands of Philip II. and the Czar Peter with the blood of their own sons.

It was, however, perhaps less to the vigour of her passion, less to his unconquerable Riqueti spirit, that Sophie and Mirabeau failed to succumb to their despair than to the influence of the very cause which had been chiefly instrumental in accomplishing their ruin—the enormous influence on his times of Jean Jacques Rousseau. It was the *Nouvelle Héloïse* that had melted the stern Brugnière to tears at the sight of the torture of a great and unfortunate passion. It was the *Nouvelle Héloïse* that had caused the Duc de la Vauguyon in Holland to pity the lovers he was commanded from Versailles to persecute. And it was the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, with its irresistible appeal to the heart, that softened and corrupted those who administered the punishment of Madame de Ruffey and the Marquis de Mirabeau. The laws of the *ancien régime* had still the power of might behind them, but public opinion, which is greater than all laws, had changed in all ranks. At the bottom men and women had begun to lose the sense of respect, in the middle to dream, at the top to reflect; all were unconsciously sowing the seed of the Revolution in the soil prepared by Rousseau—the soil of the brotherhood of hearts.

The name and rank of the Marquise de Monnier and the Comte de Mirabeau, by their prominence, gave to their passion an immense prestige. Influenced by Rousseau, people everywhere felt a sentimental pity for the lovers. Their romance, their troubles, their adventures, and the sublimity of their sacrifice for love, aroused general admiration. The Princesse de Lamballe's curiosity was typical of the opinion of the public. Accompanied

by other ladies of the Court of Versailles—that Court which censored and lionised at the same time philosophers—she drove out to Vincennes to watch its famous prisoner as he "rode within the walls in a garden of forty paces!"

All this pity and curiosity, however, had assumed a practical shape long before princesses and great ladies took to visiting Vincennes. It was but natural that M. de Rougemont, the governor of the prison, like d'Aulan, d'Alègre, de Montherot, de Changey, and even Saint-Mauris in the early days at Joux, should succumb to the magic of Mirabeau's seductive personality. But it was not to be expected that Lenoir, the Inspector-General of Police, and his subordinate, Boucher, men who in an age of despotism, one would say, should have been proof against sentiment, should be touched by the fate of two lovers whom they had never seen. Nevertheless, in the very police department Rousseau had taught the iron hands of tyranny to caress, and given a heart even to red tape and routine. There had been, too, a passion in Boucher's own life of which, under a frozen and austere exterior, he kept a burning and tender memory. With the consent, if not at the instigation, of his chief, he provided the lovers with the means of corresponding with one another.

About three weeks after his confinement in Vincennes Mirabeau received a letter from Sophie.

"I am near Ménilmontant, beloved," she wrote. "I can see it from my window. But nobody enjoys a lovely view here. This place is dreadful. There are as many as seven women in one room; in mine there are four of us. I am obliged to write to you in my bed with the curtains drawn; it is the only way in which I can be private. But why do I complain when M. Lenoir is so kind, so humane? He tells me to trust him, that he will see our letters reach their destination, so I only live now, beloved, in the expectation of hearing from you. Every day I see means of escaping. The walls of the garden

are not higher than those I once climbed! But if flight were ever so easy, if every door were open, I would not leave. For I should not be able to fly to your dungeon, and without you, beloved, whither should I go? Where should I be surer of receiving your letters than here? Let them but reach me and I could even kiss my fetters at such a price!"

This letter was the first of several hundreds that the lovers now exchanged through the secret connivance of their *bon ange*, as they called Boucher. Taken together, they are the most piercing cry of passion and despair that has ever come from the human heart. They are the attempt of love, cut off from its mate and fettered, to break through the walls that imprison it, and to communicate by words that live and breathe with the soul it can only reach in imagination. With such temperaments as Sophie and Mirabeau possessed, and under the circumstances in which they wrote, it is not surprising that there should be things uttered in this *tête-à-tête* of starved and frenzied passion to shock morality. But if ever correspondence was sacred it was this. Believing firmly that their letters were destined to perish on returning from their destination to the hands of Boucher, who for his own security made this the condition of the correspondence, the lovers stripped their souls naked in the attempt to mingle them. That Boucher had not the heart to destroy masterpieces unparalleled in literature since the days of Abélard and Héloïse can be understood, and his indiscretion in preserving them will be applauded by the generous. But what must be said of him who published them? Accidentally discovered by Manuel during the Terror, these letters were published with the express and dastardly object of blighting the fame of the demi-god of the Revolution. It is in his motive, not in the grossness with which a splendid love defiled itself, that the real outrage against decency lies.

The enormous energy that Mirabeau expended in this

correspondence exhausted while it revived him, and imperceptibly the fire of his passion began to slacken. Supplied by Boucher with books, he discovered other means of occupying his mind besides writing to Sophie. Burning with love, it was but natural that he should be interested in all literature that described it, and from his unwearied pen there flowed translations of Latin poets, tales, fables—a whole library of love. To despair, killed by recreation, succeeded a spirit of rebellion. Appealing in vain for liberty, he felt a frenzy of indignation against his father, of hatred against society, which had never before entered his heart. All the loathing of tyranny he had first experienced in Corsica, and which later, at Manosque, wrung from him his *Essay on Despotism*, was revived, never afterwards to falter. The spirit of rebellion latent in all proud, impetuous, and masterful natures took complete possession of him. He longed to make others suffer as he had suffered, to betray them as he had been betrayed, and, conscious of the superiority of his intelligence, he trained it to trick and cheat in a malicious desire to get even with the world, from which he had experienced nothing but injustice and persecution.

In this mood, being harassed by his creditors, who never ceased, even when he was in prison, to clamour for the settlement of their accounts, he undertook to appease them by raising money under false pretences. Never were his powers of persuasion displayed with more diabolical cleverness; never was his cunning more subtle and cynical; and never was the atmosphere of the theatre with which, whether by design or by chance, all his adventures were destined to be coloured, more dramatic than in the present instance.

As a comedy of manners typical of the times this fraud would have made a brilliant play. It originated out of an acquaintance that Mirabeau formed when the severity of his imprisonment, corrupted by the pity of his jailers, allowed him to mix with his fellow-prisoners.

Baudoin de Guémadeuc, whom he thus met, was a fraudulent bankrupt, who had formerly been an official in the Government service. Long accustomed to the greatest luxury and wholly devoted to pleasure, Baudoin bore the privations he suffered in Vincennes with the worst possible grace. He spent his whole time in contriving schemes by which his rehabilitation might be effected. It was his one thought, his sole object. Curiosity first attracted Mirabeau to him, a sort of pity ensued, and in his impulsive, grandiose way he promised to use the influence of the Mirabeaus in his behalf. Baudoin never stopped to consider his sympathetic fellow-prisoner's ability to execute such a promise. Ready to clutch at any straw, he at once built the wildest hopes on the protection of a man who, though as broken as himself, nevertheless assumed to perfection the airs of a *grand seigneur*.

He communicated his good news to his former secretary, Lafage, who was bound to him by the tie of a common interest. Lafage, whose prospects had been ruined by Baudoin's disgrace, saw in his rehabilitation his own only chance of fortune, and for precisely the same reason as Baudoin he was equally ready to place faith in Mirabeau's promise of aid, which, under other circumstances, he would have ridiculed as preposterous. In his turn he imparted Baudoin's news to a woman to whom he was engaged to be married, the daughter of one Dauvers, a dentist.

Through the influence of a fashionable client of her father's, Julie Dauvers had obtained, when quite a child, an insignificant post in the household of Madame Louise, a daughter of King Louis XV. Obliged to return home when her royal mistress became a nun, both she and her father had never since ceased to regret the connection they had lost with the Court. To return to Versailles was the dream of Julie's life, to find Court influence the one object of her father the dentist. Like Baudoin,

they had become the slaves of a fixed idea, and like him, they saw in Mirabeau, with his name, his rank, and his powerful relations, the very influence they were in search of.

To arouse his interest in her, Julie was advised by her father and Lafage, and prompted by her own ambition, to send him through Baudoin a message expressing pity for his fate and admiration of his courage in braving convention for the sake of his grand passion. With Mirabeau, to receive such a message was to answer it, and a correspondence was thus begun between them, which, on Julie's part, had the securing of his supposed influence on her behalf as its object, and on his, at first, merely idle amusement. The correspondence, however, had scarcely begun when Mirabeau's creditors became importunate, and the idea occurred to him that the money he needed might be raised by imposing on the Dauvers' belief in his power to further their ends, which he had quickly guessed.

No one knew better than he how much he lacked the influence he boasted, and how impossible it would be to extract money from Dauvers, who, though credulous and vain to a degree, was too shrewd a *bourgeois* to advance a sou without a *quid pro quo*. But difficulties never daunted Mirabeau; his faith in his ability to dupe Julie and her father was unlimited, and he set himself to his unscrupulous task with all the confidence of a card-sharper who has skilfully dealt himself the winning cards.

Most audacious when success appeared most improbable, his vanity and love of parade made him use the name of the Princesse de Lamballe as the means to his end. This idea was suggested to him by an episode connected with a visit she had paid to Vincennes a short time before. One day while singing to the accompaniment of a guitar on a battlement on which he was allowed to take the air, he suddenly observed a handkerchief

being waved in his direction from a window in the governor's quarters. A turnkey had previously told him that Mesdames de Lamballe and de Guéménée were calling on Madame de Rougemont, the governor's wife, and Mirabeau's vanity at once made him jump to the conclusion that it was her Royal Highness herself who had waved the handkerchief. This impression he had conveyed in a letter to Julie as a positive fact, and of this incident he now proceeded to make all possible capital.

"So you wish to be reader to a great lady?" he wrote in that tone of *insouciant* confidence that seldom failed to carry conviction. "Nothing could be easier. I have only to recommend you to the Princesse de Lamballe. She will, as you know, do anything I ask."

But Julie, eager though she was to believe him, had still enough of her native cunning left to demand a tangible proof of his ability to secure her so splendid a patroness. Quite undaunted, Mirabeau set to work to forge several letters from Madame de Lamballe to himself, testifying her great regard for him. To these he added another, in which the Princess expressed her willingness to befriend Mademoiselle Julie Dauvers, as well as M. Baudoin de Guémadeuc and M. Lafage. The receipt of these letters increased to the last degree of folly the credulity of this crew of intriguers. Any doubt that might have tormented them as to the absurdity of counting on the influence of a prisoner in Vincennes vanished. And Dauvers, too dazzled by the splendour of the Princesse de Lamballe's promises to detect their forgery, was induced, close-fisted and cautious *bourgeois* that he was, to advance the Comte de Mirabeau the sum of five thousand francs on the security of his promissory note!

About the same time that the lover of the Marquise de Monnier was amusing himself with this little adventure the term of his imprisonment drew to a close.

When the doors of his dungeon had closed on him, his father, carried away by the fury of his hate, had sworn that he should never more see the light of day.

"Should I die before him," he said to those who dared to utter a protest against his inhuman rage, "he will still wear his chains. I have taken measures to secure his confinement for life. Let him rot, then, in Vincennes!"

But circumstances soon arose that gradually overcame this implacable resolve.

The arrest of his son had not been the only commission that Brugnière had received from the Marquis de Mirabeau. For the part that his wife, with her money, and Madame de Cabris, with her advice, had played in the flight of the lovers, the Marquis determined to make them suffer too. As usual he had recourse to *lettres de cachet*. By one of these weapons of despotism the Marquise de Mirabeau was disabled during nearly the whole time her son was in prison; and six days after Brugnière had brought her brother to Vincennes he arrested Madame de Cabris. But while the law gave the Marquis power over his wife, it gave him none over his daughter, who, by her marriage, was freed from his control. Arrested by fraud, Madame de Cabris escaped, and returned, for her greater security, to her husband at Grasse, over whose feeble mind she had gained a complete ascendancy.

The Marquis was not to be cheated of his vengeance by this child whom he had loved the best, and now hated the most, of all his children. Knowing that her extravagance had estranged her from her husband's relations, he suggested to them that they should summon a *conseil de famille* to place de Cabris, whose mental irresponsibility was but too evident, under restraint, and at the same time deprive his wife of her liberty on the ground of her wasteful expenditure and scandalous life. This was done; and Madame de Cabris, unable to escape from the net spread for her, but cunning to

the last, placed herself on the arrival of the police sent to arrest her in bed beside her husband, in order that the world should be scandalised by the brutality of her persecution. In fact, scandal was the means she employed to revenge herself on her father. It was the only weapon she had, and she used it unsparingly, attacking in her rage friends and foes alike, regardless of whom she wounded.

It was in this way that she and Mirabeau quarrelled over Briançon. This fellow, partly to gratify his dislike of Mirabeau, partly by causing a disagreeable scandal to defend himself from the Marquis, who had threatened to have him arrested, notified his intention of publishing some love-letters in his possession that had passed between Sophie and Mirabeau before their flight. On learning this, Mirabeau wrote to his sister and commanded her to prevent Briançon from taking so cowardly a revenge on him. Madame de Cabris saw fit to resent the tone of this letter, which all but accused her of acting in concert with Briançon. The quarrel that followed was of the bitterest, and caused the eternal estrangement of the brother and sister.

But while the Mirabeaus in prison and out shocked the world with the noise of their quarrels and the indecency of their scandals, they received a blow that crushed even the Marquis himself. His grandson, little Victor, the hope of the race, died suddenly. To the day of his own death he believed the child had been poisoned by Emilie's relations.

"With Gabriel in prison and for ever separated from his wife," he wailed to the Bailli, "there was nothing between them and Marignane's fortune but the boy, so they have not hesitated to remove him!".

The Marquis' avarice, baulked by this death of the great Marignane estates, which he had dreamt of adding to those of Mirabeau, caused him for the first time to think of releasing his son and reconciling him to his

wife. But above all was he influenced by a passionate desire to perpetuate his race. It is true, from his younger son, Boniface, who had recently married—alone of his children without his consent—he had hopes of posterity. But the hot-headed young Vicomte had left his bride, to join the French army in America under Lafayette. Suppose the news should come that he had been killed fighting the English? With Gabriel in Vincennes for life the race would become extinct! At the thought the dead and gone Riquetis seemed to the crushed Marquis to rise out of their tombs and command him to free his heir. Seeing his chastened mood, friends and family once more united to plead for pardon for his son. And at last, after nearly four years of the closest confinement, Mirabeau left Vincennes.

Most terrible of schools, he had acquired in it the eloquence that was to make him the master of the Revolution, the hatred of oppression that was to make him shatter the throne, and the unscrupulousness that was to cover his fame with stains so deep that not even his glory could efface them altogether.

And Sophie?

Not long after her arrival at the "Nouvelle France" in Paris the child of her *liaison* was born—a girl known in her correspondence with Mirabeau simply as Sophie Gabrielle. Added to the privilege of being allowed to communicate with her lover, the birth of *his* child gave a sort of glory to the horrors of her degradation. To her emotional imagination the secret joy she now experienced was the apotheosis of her passion.

This transcendental mood did not last long, however. Deprived of her babe ere it was weaned, by the virtuous cruelty of her scandalised parents, and at the same time removed to the convent in the town of Gien, where she was kept in a rigorous confinement, Sophie's spirit was broken. She was still permitted, by the intervention of Boucher, to carry on her correspondence with Mirabeau,

but she had no longer the energy to infuse her soul into her letters.

The deadly blight of separation now began to fall on the passion of both lovers. Sophie resented the other occupations with which Mirabeau sought to feed his insatiable energy. Two priests attached to her convent compromised her by their unwelcome attentions, and as everything about such a woman was suspicious, their obsession caused an odious calumny to be circulated, which eventually reached the ears of the prisoner in Vincennes. He dared to reproach her with being indiscreet, then, filled with remorse, passionately begged her pardon. She granted it; but the wound she had received did not heal, and a mutual doubt, jealousy, and misunderstanding took the place of their previous implicit trust.

They still continued to write to one another, but the complaints with which the letters of each were filled had extinguished the fire of their passion. When Mirabeau regained his liberty, they had but to meet to realise that the ashes of their love were cold.

Ysabeau, physician to the convent at Gien, who had interested himself in striving to ameliorate Sophie's imprisonment as Boucher had done Mirabeau's at Vincennes, arranged their meeting. Disguised as a pedlar, Mirabeau was admitted by him and a friendly nun to Sophie's cell. But instead of falling into one another's arms, the lovers burst into mutual reproaches, accusations, rage, and tears, and parted, never to meet, never to hear from one another again.

In surviving such a scene, Sophie knew that her love was dead. She wept over its corpse long and grievously, and then buried it sadly. Two years later the old Marquis de Monnier died, and she, too, regained her freedom. Discouraged with life, she remained voluntarily at Gien, in a little house attached to the convent which had been her prison. Here for the remaining

eight years of her life she lived under the name of Madame de Malleroy. Her dramatic romance, coupled with her beauty, her winsome charm and gifted mind, excited the highest curiosity. Respectability, influenced by the tears it had shed over the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, courted her, and even love came back from its grave to console her.

At first it did not seem possible that life could ever contain fresh joy for her. But she was very lonely, very unhappy. Touched by the devotion of a young nobleman of the neighbourhood, a M. de Poterat, who offered her a love more chaste, more tender, and more restful than she had ever known love could be, or would have desired it to be in her passionate past, she accepted it. They were to be married ; they were both still young, and life did seem at last to promise her the happiness she had sought in vain. But she was destined to be deceived again. On the eve of the marriage Poterat bled to death in her arms from a hæmorrhage of the lungs. The blow was insupportable. The future, like the past, then, was to be nothing but torture ? Capable of every emotion but resignation, she determined to die. The thought no sooner flashed into her brain than it became a resolution. With stoical composure she collected her papers, tied them in bundles, sealed them, and wrote a letter of farewell to her ever-loyal friend, Dr. Ysabeau. Then she entered a small closet, carefully closed and caulked the door, filled two chafing-dishes with charcoal, which she lit, and, in order to prevent her purpose from being counteracted by any instinctive effort of nature, bound herself by the legs and arms to a chair. In this position she was discovered dead, but still warm. Her death was considered a public calamity in Gien, and the whole town, without distinction of class, followed her to the grave.

Nine years had passed since the Marquise de Monnier and Mirabeau had parted. He was now King of the

Revolution, the greatest man in France ; and ambition, not love, was his mistress. But so deep and terrible a passion as theirs had been is never effaced from the human heart. It is like the subtle perfume of flowers that clings to the vase from which they have been thrown.

When the news of the death of this woman, with whom his name was indelibly associated, was conveyed to him, he was rising to address the National Assembly. Visibly agitated, he went out without a word, and it was three days before France heard his Orphean voice again.

PART III

THE DEMON OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

CHAPTER I

THE FRESH START

THE lesson of the necessity of conforming to the ethical conventions of society or of being crushed by them—a lesson that experience had failed to teach Mirabeau—he had learnt sadly enough through disillusion.

In his dungeon at Vincennes he had often dreamt of rehabilitation, but it was not till he had parted from Sophie in the convent at Gien that he realised how necessary it was to him. Under the spell of his great blind love he had not perceived the pass to which it had brought him; it was only when it was dead that he felt the shame of disgrace and the terror of destitution. Any seed sown in an imagination so fertile as his grew rapidly; the desire to rehabilitate himself became a purpose, an obsession, a passion. It was at once honest and noble, sordid and unprincipled.

"To wipe out my disgrace," he said to himself, "I must go to Pontarlier and obtain the reversion of my sentence, and to relieve my poverty I must go back to my wife."

Genuine as was his desire to blot out the past, any rehabilitation that left him poor and hunted by creditors he would have regarded as no rehabilitation at all. He was dazzled by the thought of the Marignane millions, and so urgent was his need of money that he even felt a sort of tenderness for his wife. This mock emotion was

singularly interwoven with the motives that urged him to go to Pontarlier, for he was not quite so vain as to imagine that Emilie, after all that had happened, would be permitted to unite her fate with his again without some proof of his worthiness—and what more convincing proof could he give her than to appear before her freed from the sentence that had condemned him to death for adultery and abduction ?

"What ?" exclaimed the Marquis, when his permission to go to Pontarlier was asked. "You would have your case heard afresh ? Nonsense ! your life is in no danger. Your imprisonment has nullified the sentence of the court."

"That is so," pleaded Mirabeau. "Nevertheless, I would go to Pontarlier and surrender myself to the tribunal that condemned me. I wish to reclaim my honour, the honour of the Riquetis ! Our name has been dragged in the mire in the sight of all France : give me the chance of raising it out of the gutter of scandal, of cleansing it, of replacing it on the pedestal of prestige from which it has fallen. Oh, my father, in the name of our ancestors, I beseech you !"

"You are more likely to drag our name and our honour deeper into the mire," snarled the Marquis, who was not unresponsive to this appeal, in spite of a suspicion that his son was trying to bewitch him, as he had the governors and warders of the various fortresses in which he had been imprisoned. "What about the disgrace of sitting in Pontarlier jail like a common criminal while waiting for your trial ? And what about the disgrace of another conviction ?"

"A conviction ? Oh, there is not the least danger of that," returned Mirabeau confidently. "You see, sir, the dread of the Marquis de Monnier and the de Ruffeys at the prospect of reopening a *cause célèbre* in which their dishonour and their cupboard skeletons will be dragged once more into the light will guarantee me

against a conviction. Much as they may wish to injure me, once they are assured that my object is not to be revenged on them, they will bestir themselves as actively to obtain my acquittal as they did to obtain my conviction."

The Marquis was obliged to admit the truth of this wily reasoning, but he yielded to his pride rather than to his son's power of persuasion. The disgrace that had been put on his name by the court of Pontarlier had rankled, and as an appeal to his revenge seldom went unanswered, he consented to let his son go to Pontarlier, not so much to obtain the reversion of an empty sentence pronounced by judges whom he considered as impertinent scoundrels, as to prove to these Monniers and Ruffeys, these *roturiers*, these nobles of the robe who were behind the judges, that they had to deal with that superior creation of the Almighty, a noble of the sword, a real *grand seigneur*, of whom a Marquis de Mirabeau was the most perfect type!

The news that the Comte de Mirabeau, whose elopement with the Marquise de Monnier had caused such a scandal four years before, had no sooner been released from the dungeons of Vincennes than he had gone back to Pontarlier to appeal against the sentence of the court which had condemned him to be beheaded in effigy excited the greatest interest all over France. It was anticipated that the fresh trial he demanded would be even more piquant than the former; and while awaiting it public interest was centred in Pontarlier, where the whilom lover of Sophie de Monnier, whose prisons had at least been fortresses, was now voluntarily confined in a common jail with forgers, thieves, and murderers.

Ever active, he began at once to fling out from his cell squibs of memorials, documents, and pamphlets, in which he asserted his innocence in a manner that covered his accusers with odium. The effect on the Marquis de Monnier and the de Ruffeys was such as he had

predicted. At the end of three months, by playing on the fears of these people, he blackmailed a full acquittal out of the judges in their pay.

But this was not enough for him. Having freed himself, he resolved to free the woman who had been condemned with him, the woman he had ruined and loved. His impulsive generosity—which in him took the place of a conscience—pricked by the memory of Sophie as he had last seen her, was tormented by the contrast between the wretched, jealous creature with whom he had broken for ever in the convent at Gien and the dazzling Marquise who had so fascinated him when he first beheld her at the *fête* in honour of the coronation of Louis XVI.

"And now," he informed the astonished Marquis de Monnier, "I demand redress for the Marquise. I shall not leave Pontarlier or hold my tongue until you have given her her liberty, restored her *dot*, and settled on her an allowance sufficient to enable her to live decently."

Monnier, broken with old age, shame, and a guilty conscience, had yielded; and Mirabeau, armed with proofs that testified to the chivalry of his nature rather than to the disinterestedness of his intentions, rushed off to Provence to claim his wife.

During the eight or nine years that had elapsed since his imprisonment in the Château d'If, Emilie had resided with her father in Aix. The pleasures of the Court of Love, for which she had sighed so bitterly at Mirabeau and Manosque, had more than compensated for the unhappiness of her marriage. Her life had been a brilliant revel, a fascinating pursuit of pleasure, marred only by the death of her little son, in whom her own affections no less than the hopes of the Riquetis had centred. But she had soon forgotten him in the everlasting whirl of balls, dinners, concerts, and theatricals in which she lived. With her rank and her wealth and her passion for amusement, she had become in the course of time the Queen of the Court of Love. Nothing could have

been more repugnant to her than to renounce this life, and cast her lot once more with her husband. She never thought of him but she shuddered, never heard his name mentioned but she had a presentiment of misfortune.

"I will not go back to him," she said to her father when the Marquis de Mirabeau wrote to both of them to urge the reunion. "No power on earth shall compel me; I would sooner die than live with him again!"

To these letters there had been no reply, and it was perhaps only a Marquis de Mirabeau or his son who could have cherished the hope of a favourable answer, and failing none at all, continued to press a claim which, considering everything, might reasonably be said to have lapsed.

Opposition, however, only served to render the Marquis more stubborn and Mirabeau more energetic. The one believed that perseverance, if sufficiently determined, would break down any barrier; the other relied on his powers of seduction to conciliate. Both had had a remarkable proof of the effect of persistence and personality in the manner in which the Bailli had been recruited into serving a cause that was repugnant to him. The scandal of Mirabeau's elopement with the Marquise de Monnier had angered him beyond measure.

"The aversion I feel for your son surprises me," he had written to his brother, "and terrible as it is to me to contemplate the possible extinction of my race, I would rather our name disappeared than that the wretch in Vincennes should continue it."

It was therefore with the utmost indignation that he had received a letter from the Marquis informing him that his nephew was coming to Provence to win back his wife, and that *he* was expected to aid in the undertaking.

"Have you not had enough scandal?" he replied. "Our father gave you our 'scutcheon clean, and you have not hesitated to stain it in order to gratify a spite

that is ruining you. What with your interminable and scandalous lawsuits with your unutterable wife, what with your public quarrels with your children, what with your professed friendship for humanity and the fifty-four *lettres de cachet* that you have obtained from the despotism you denounce, you have made yourself a laughing-stock and the name of Mirabeau a byword. If you think that the Comtesse de Mirabeau is going to return to her husband—and such a husband!—after living apart from him all these years, you are much mistaken. If you and your mad son attempt to force her, there will be a scandal beside which those we have already suffered will be trivial. My patience is exhausted. I will have nothing to do with this affair, and I warn you that if you send your son to the Château de Mirabeau, as you propose, I shall leave it!"

To these reproaches, the first the Bailli had ever uttered, the Marquis had replied with a humility that it would have been impossible for him to have assumed to any one else. But costly as it was to his pride to stoop even to his brother, he gained his point. The Bailli sullenly yielded after further resistance, and Mirabeau set out for the ancestral castle, where he had scarcely arrived before he managed to recover with interest his uncle's affection.

"I confess," the Bailli wrote the Marquis, "that I have been very unjust to Gabriel. I can only echo the praises of him that I hear on all sides. He is immensely popular with our people at Mirabeau. They gave him an extraordinary welcome, considering the years since he left here, and the fact that he still owes some of them money."

"I am not at all edified by your letter," replied the Marquis sarcastically, glad of an opportunity to revenge his pride for the humility to which his brother had subjected it. "As to the joy of the peasants at seeing Gabriel, a tambourine and a pipe would make them

dance before a cat. And as for you, let me warn you to beware of my magpie—he has a golden bill."

These sarcasms, however, had failed to check the Bailli's admiration of his nephew. Bitten by his "golden bill," the uncle was as eager to serve him as when the "Baron de Pierre-Buffière" had come from the Corsican war and won his heart in spite of himself. Given, therefore, Gabriel's success at Pontarlier and his conquest of the Bailli, his confidence in his power to win back his wife was not unreasonable, in spite of the strong opposition which he now encountered.

Accompanied by the Bailli he went to Aix, but try as he might he could not get access to his wife. He called several times at the Marquis de Marignane's only to find the doors closed to him. He wrote several letters which were returned unopened. When all attempts at conciliation had failed, he had recourse to force; the Comtesse de Mirabeau received a letter ordering her to return to her husband's roof. To this there came a reply in the form of a legal demand for an absolute separation on the ground of cruelty, infidelity, and desertion.

"So Marignane is determined to fight us," remarked Mirabeau to his uncle on receiving this notice. "Well, he is beaten beforehand. The grounds on which Emilie's demands are based are absolutely untenable. Let us take infidelity first, as the easiest charge to dispose of. Did you ever know the infidelity of a husband to carry weight in a suit of this sort? The laxity of our customs regards a faithless husband with indulgence. The charge is absurd; if it is brought it will be laughed out of court. Secondly, there is the charge of desertion. Why, it was she who deserted me! Did she not refuse point-blank to come to me at Pontarlier when I besought her, in the hope that if she were with me my duty to her would save me from yielding to the temptation against which I was struggling? Oh, uncle, God alone knows how hard I struggled!"

The recollection of the icy answer he had received on that occasion to his passionate appeal to his wife angered him.

"Ah, but she herself gives me the weapons of my revenge!" he added furiously. "I will blight her charge of cruelty with scorn, wither it with ridicule, by citing in open court *her* infidelity to me. Cruelty, indeed! Has she forgotten her intrigue with Gassaud, I wonder?"

Had the Bailli been told a week before that he would not only listen without protest to words pregnant with scandal falling from the lips of his nephew, but even echo the indignation that caused them and encourage the speaker to put them into action, he would have scoffed at the prediction as the vapouring of a lunatic. Foreseeing strong opposition on the part of Emilie, he had come to Aix with the intention of restraining Mirabeau's impetuosity and of exercising his own tact and personal influence. But the rebuffs he had received from the Marquis de Marignane and his daughter had fired his quick Riqueti blood and caused him to act as a spur rather than a curb to his nephew.

"Yes," he said eagerly, "if Marignane wishes war he shall have it. You must apply for a writ compelling your wife to return to you at once or to retire to a convent till the case is finished. And the next thing is to arm ourselves with an able lawyer."

But the Marquis de Marignane had retained all the lawyers of any repute and entrusted the care of the case to Portalis, whose rising reputation was destined to become famous under Napoleon.

"No matter," said Mirabeau with a shrug to his uncle, who was discouraged by this reverse; "I shall plead my cause myself."

"But how can you hope to win, my poor boy?" groaned the Bailli. "The bar at Aix is the most brilliant in France, and what do you know about law?"

"You forget the experience I have just had at Pontarlier," was the reply. "Besides, the very difficulty of obtaining this writ will procure it for me. My energy is never so great as when there is an obstacle to overcome. My confidence feeds on difficulties. In my vocabulary, uncle, there is no such word as impossible!"

There was the *élan* of victory in the flash of his eyes, in the throb of his voice.

"I feel sure," said the Bailli with a thrill, "that you will succeed."

He did; and the effect he produced was as dramatic as he could have desired. For he had arrayed against him not only the most brilliant legal talent in France, but he was still further handicapped by reading his speech, which, prepared with great care, he hesitated to commit to memory from fear of missing a single point. He delivered it, however, with an eloquence that nobody ever dreamed he possessed. The gross plagiarisms with which it was packed aided rather than detracted from the effect he sought to produce. His peroration, which he had stolen word for word from Bossuet's celebrated *oraison funèbre* on Mademoiselle de la Vallière, was particularly effective. The ardour, pathos, and tenderness with which he declaimed it carried the court away and reduced even the Marquis de Marignane to tears!

The winning of his writ was, however, only a skirmish; the battle that was to decide the case had yet to be fought. The Bailli, whose prudence had not been altogether charmed away by admiration of his nephew's abilities, did, indeed, endeavour to arrange a peace. Nor was Mirabeau averse to conciliate his wife, on whose fortune he counted to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of the world. An attempt was made to dazzle Emilie with the prospect of a great position at Versailles, which the uncle and nephew boasted could be obtained through the influence of the Marquis de Mirabeau. But she knew her father-in-law too well to rely on his willingness or

influence to compensate her as she would wish for the loss of the sovereignty of the Court of Love. Moreover the Marquis de Marignane had gone too far, in spite of his tears, to recede from the position he had taken up. Urged by Portalis and his daughter, he appealed against the decision of the court to the Parliament.

Before the hearing of the appeal Portalis took advantage of a legal custom to publish a statement of his case, in which he sought to destroy the effect of his opponent's success. In this document the charges on which the Comtesse de Mirabeau based her suit were repeated and supported by extracts from letters that the Marquis de Mirabeau had written to his daughter-in-law and her father. To this violent and provocative attack Mirabeau replied with great dignity and moderation. Both statements had a huge circulation, and the curiosity with which all France had followed the proceedings at Aix was now whetted to the highest pitch.

All eyes were fixed on "that town no bigger than a snuff-box" where the love of scandal scented—in the astonishing audacity of such a man as Mirabeau pleading for the restitution of conjugal rights ; in all the notoriety and romance connected with his name, now heightened by his moving eloquence ; in the reputation of his father, whose strange mixture of philanthropy and persecution, of avarice and reckless waste, had made so loud a noise ; in the rank and social position of the Marquis de Marignane and his daughter ; in the rising fame of Portalis—all the elements of a *cause célèbre.*

Aix swarmed with strangers, foreign royalties, foreign lords, and Provençal squireens, who invaded and divided the amazed Court of Love. Two factions were formed ; one for the Comte de Mirabeau, the other for the Comtesse. The hours that had been wasted formerly in balls and comedies were now devoted to street brawls and duels. A Lord Peterborough constituted himself the champion of the Comte de Mirabeau and drew his sword on the

Promenade at Aix on the Comte de Gallifet, the bosom friend of the Marquis de Marignane! So hot were the feuds, so hostile the cliques created by this celebrated case, that the Court of Love never recovered its old *insouciant* charm. Six years later the Revolution found the once brilliant iridescent bubble, that pleasure had blown so big, puffed fitfully by discord from *château* to *château* round Aix and blew it over the Alps.

The effect of Portalis' statement, which was quite contrary to what he had intended, alarmed the Marquis de Marignane, whose credit was greatly impaired by the unscrupulous use he had made of the Marquis de Mirabeau's private correspondence with him.

"I should never have permitted you to publish those letters," he complained. "It was not quite—quite in keeping with the code of honour of a noble. Some of my oldest friends have cut me."

"In the law, M. le Marquis," replied Portalis consolingly, "honour is a question of strategy. The fact is," he added to himself, "I was not violent enough. That horse of moderation on which the Comte is riding must be spurred until it bolts and throws him."

The subtle lawyer, in his desire to win this case, on which his reputation depended, was quite prepared if necessary to sacrifice that of his client. In his defence of the Comtesse de Mirabeau, with which the appeal opened, he was not content to base his arguments for an absolute separation on the past career of his opponent. Having exhausted his powers of invective in rehearsing all the scandals connected with the name of the Comte de Mirabeau, from the affair at Saintes to the fraud of which Julie Danvers had been the dupe, he stripped off the rags of respectability that still covered his father, his mother, and Madame de Cabris, and flayed them with calumny and ridicule. Never before in a court of law had such a scathing indictment of a noble family been heard. The moral effect of it on the public was

similar to that produced by the inculpation of the Queen in the *affaire* of the Diamond Necklace a few years later. The one removed the last vestige of respect for the nobility, the other shook the throne.

Portalis' object had been to remove all possibility of reconciliation between the husband and wife, by which he trusted to influence the decision of the judges, four of whom out of eight had previously been bought.

"Come what will," he said to himself when he had finished, "I have succeeded. Let him answer me with moderation now if he can!"

After Portalis' speech the parliamentary court adjourned, in accordance with legal custom, for several days to enable the defendant to prepare his reply. The delay, however, was in this instance quite unnecessary. Mirabeau's answer, leaping armed and ready from the insults of Portalis, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter, fretted and foamed under the temporary restraint like a stallion on the curb. The public was scarcely less impatient. On the day he was to plead the guards, although trebled, were unable to preserve the dignity of the Parliament. The populace, shut out from the court-room, which was crowded with the *élite* of Aix, made a rush for the doors and tore them from their hinges in order that those without might see and hear what went on within. Every conceivable coign of vantage in the vicinity was instantly occupied; windows, roofs, and trees swarmed with human beings.

To such an overture Mirabeau's temperament was most harmoniously attuned. Excited by a contest on which, as he believed, his whole future depended; devoured by a passion to speak in public which was born of the eloquence he had but so recently discovered he possessed, he gave the rein to indignation. So intense was his scorn, so impassioned his invective, so majestic his bearing, that the judges who had been bribed to decide against him quaked in their seats. Portalis,

withered and scorched by the lava of irony, mockery, contempt, and ridicule that poured upon him, was carried fainting from the court-room!

Having discomfited the most brilliant lawyer in France and revenged the insulted honour of his family, had Mirabeau resumed the moderate and dignified tactics that he had adopted in his former speech, he must have won his case. But, carried away by his impetuosity, he rushed into the pitfall Portalis had prepared for him. To free himself of the charge of cruelty, on which the subtle lawyer had laid particular stress, he was so reckless as to disclose the infidelity of his wife with the Chevalier de Gassaud. Recognising the absurdity of pleading for a wife whom he was denouncing as an adulteress, he became confused, and in attempting to withdraw his accusation he maladroitly entangled himself in his own eloquence. After this error, to obtain a verdict in his favour was impossible. The judges accordingly permitted the Comtesse de Mirabeau to retain her independence and the control of her fortune.

There remained, however, a higher court to which Gabriel might yet appeal with hope of success—the Council of State at Versailles. To abandon his case while there was the least possibility of winning was not to be dreamt of; even if pride—the unconquerable, stubborn Riqueti pride—had inclined him to accept his defeat, the urgent need of his wife's fortune would have spurred him to further resistance. But to appeal to the Council of State was a costly proceeding, and the Marquis de Mirabeau was both unwilling and unable to provide his son with the necessary funds. Ashamed for the first time in his life of the publicity given to the domestic broils of his family, he commanded his son sternly to abandon the case.

Mirabeau, however, had no intention of obeying while there was the least chance of procuring money in order to appeal to the Council of State. Hitherto the expense

that he was obliged to incur in pleading before the court and the Parliament had been defrayed by the Bailli. But the Bailli, who was profoundly discouraged by the turn of events, now refused to provide the funds for further humiliation.

"No," he said firmly; "if in defiance of your father's command you persist in this disgraceful wild-goose chase after a wife, I shall wash my hands of you. You are welcome to the twenty thousand livres I have already given you, but I shall not advance another sou."

As no one else, considering the debts with which he was crippled, was likely to lend him the money he required, Gabriel was gloomily resigning himself to the necessity of complying with his father's command, when his mother unexpectedly offered him assistance—on one condition.

The Marquis would at any time have resented the intervention of his wife, but on this occasion circumstances rendered it particularly odious. Before releasing Mirabeau from Vincennes he had taken advantage of the prospect, which at the time seemed promising, of winning his lawsuit with his wife, to exact from his son a pledge of his active co-operation as the condition of his freedom. The heinous indecency of such a bargain was a matter of as perfect indifference to the father as to the son. Mirabeau's imprisonment had been too long and too severe for him to suffer any scruple to stand in the way of his freedom, while the Friend of Men, whose whole life had been spent in vain efforts to have his own way, believed any means he employed to that end were justifiable. Mirabeau had, consequently, readily accepted his father's condition and championed his cause in the courts; unsuccessfully, however, for the lawsuit was eventually decided in favour of the Marquise. Flushed with her triumph, which, in a struggle that had lasted fourteen years, brought both of them to the verge of bankruptcy, the Marquise had immediately brought

another action against her husband for the recovery of her *dot*, of which he still retained the use—an action that two years later completed their common ruin. It was in the hope of enlisting her son in her cause that she now in her turn made this the condition of her offer of financial help.

To thread the dark and tortuous mazes of the scandalous domestic quarrel in which the Riquetis lost their fortune and honour would be, if it were possible, unnecessary. It is enough to know that, in the course of this family guerilla, the Marquis and Marquise de Mirabeau eagerly descended to the lowest depths of human nature to find inducements to offer their children to join in the fray. From time to time in the last fourteen years the public had beheld the children arrayed now against their mother in behalf of their father, now against their father in behalf of their mother, and yet again one against the other. Not even the epileptic Marianne, Mirabeau's eldest sister, who had been forced to take the veil as a means of secluding her conveniently from the world, had been permitted to remain neutral. For when the Mirabeaus had one of their battles to fight they were no respecters of a convent close. The intrigue that dragged Marianne into the quarrel of her parents had deprived her completely and for ever of her reason. It was, therefore, not surprising that Mirabeau should suddenly abandon his father to side with his mother. It was by no means the first time that he had changed sides, and now, as on former occasions, the imperative need of money made him sell himself to the highest bidder.

But from this alliance he gained nothing but an infamous notoriety. It was impossible that rehabilitation could be won by means so unscrupulous; he but dragged himself and his name still lower. The sight of so many Riqueti skeletons torn from their cupboards and shamelessly exposed to the public view had horrified Respectability beyond description.

In spite of all his efforts the Council of State refused to hear his appeal.

In his previous misfortunes he had ever found one member at least of his family to sympathise with him, but now all united to ostracise him. Finding that she had paid too dearly for his aid, the Marquise did not hesitate to quarrel with him, and this time the breach was never healed. Madame de Cabris vowed that her hatred of him should last till death—a vow she kept. His brother Boniface refused to acknowledge his existence, and regarded himself as the heir to the family. The Bailli, whom he had fascinated and disenchanted by turns, tried in vain to forget him; once or twice a year he was impelled to write him a cold letter, as was Madame du Saillant. But pity gradually crept into their letters, and prepared the way for a reconciliation when the Revolution raised him magically, as it did so many others, from the mire of infamy and set him upon a pinnacle of glory.

With his father reconciliation was impossible. On learning the terms of the treaty between Mirabeau and the Marquise he resolved to cut such a son out of his life altogether.

"You may inform him," he wrote the Bailli coldly, "for I shall enter into no correspondence with him, that I consider him henceforth as dead. If he attempts to seek me he will find his name written on my door with a note signifying my intention not to see him nor communicate with him. As he need hope for no assistance from me he need fear no injury. I shall give him neither advice, nor money, nor commands, nor take any further interest in him. He is now thirty-four, let him shift as best he can. Under these circumstances I have returned to the Keeper of the Seals the *lettre de cachet* which the King had the graciousness to grant me."

The old fighting spirit of Brutus had begun to faint under the calamities that rained on him. If he did not

quite keep to the letter of this sentence of disinheritance, he faithfully observed its spirit. A couple of years later, when the termagant Marquise had succeeded in ruining herself as well as her husband, the Marquis was obliged to sell Bignon, that "little basket of vegetables" as he had called it in the old days of his Economical experiments in agriculture. The Bailli implored him to take up his residence once more at Mirabeau, but, crushed though the Marquis was, his pride rebelled at the idea of returning old, broken, *manqué*, to the home, mortgaged up to the hilt, which he had left fifty years before to win a glorious renown. From this humiliation he was saved by Madame de Pailly. The Egeria, to her credit, did not desert her man of genius; having broken his life, she now tried to mend it. Hidden away from the world in an old house near Paris, this couple, bound together by a tie that only death could sever, lived for the next six years.

Into this retreat of humbled pride, blasted hopes, overleaping ambitions, fruitless genius, and unconquerable devotion there came from time to time news of Mirabeau. Once with the fame of one of his books he even unlocked the doors and penetrated to the fireside where his father sat mumbling out predictions of national ruin. But these visits were rare and painful, and the Marquis had ceased to exist as far as his son was concerned.

After his death Madame de Pailly disappeared without leaving a trace, sucked out of sight, like many others, in the constantly shifting quicksands of the Revolution.

As for Emilie, she and Mirabeau never met again. The *cause célèbre* which blighted the Court of Love was but the presage of still greater calamities for her. Driven out of Aix and France by the Revolution, she and her father wandered for years about Italy, always poor, often in want. To follow them through all the indignities, griefs, and terrors of a revolutionary exile would be but to recite a familiar tale of aristocratic distress.

Her fate, however, was not without a certain dramatic

pathos. The Revolution, which extinguished so much, extinguished the hatred in which her name was held by Mirabeau's family. In the quieter times under Napoleon, the heiress on whose fortune the Mirabeaus had once counted to retrieve theirs was rescued, half mad and destitute, by Madame du Saillant, in whose house she died a short while afterwards.

Such were the results of Mirabeau's first attempt at rehabilitation.

CHAPTER II

HERCULES IN SEARCH OF A CLUB

MIRABEAU stood alone now, penniless, friendless, covered with obloquy, a pariah, a thing. With all society against him, a man so broken must have been hounded into a criminal obscurity, to a depth so low that not even the angel of redemption could descend to it. And this would assuredly have been his fate but for a something in him that nothing could crush.

He resolved to live somehow and to live free. His pen had kept the life in him once, it would serve again. What mattered it how he prostituted his faculties, into what filth he dipped his pen, so he lived? All the knowledge and experience he had ever acquired at the Abbé Choquard's, in the world, in his various exiles and prisons, were now his only capital. He did work which dishonoured the meanest work. He sought it here, there, everywhere, and sold his honour, his pride, his convictions, his soul, for a little gold. He hired himself to stockbrokers to bolster up or expose rotten companies, and to editors, pamphleteers or publicists in need of a ready pen. Like Beaumarchais in the sewers of Paris, he lived in the sewers of literature, whence driven by hunger, he crept stealthily into its palaces and temples, robbing them of whatever took his fancy. To arrest this Cartouche of plagiarists was very dangerous, as those *gens d'armes* of letters, the critics, sent to capture him quickly learnt to their cost. For he had

a way of cunningly luring them into an ambush and terrorising them into laying down their arms by means of pasquinades, epigrams, and libels.

The fresh notoriety he now began to earn attracted the attention of Ministers. Calonne employed him, as one might employ a bandit—to murder a rival reputation. To suffer himself to be cheated out of any portion of the advantage to be derived from such a connection was not in the nature of Mirabeau. With the intrepid audacity of one in whom all sense of shame is dead, he even descended to blackmail.

"I will teach you," he threatened the slippery statesman, "that if I am a useful tool to use I am a dangerous one to throw away!"

Then, fearing lest he might have gone too far, he fled to England, where he sought out his old boyhood's friend, Gilbert Elliot.

For a moment the sun burst through the clouds. In a foreign country a new life seemed possible. But Calonne was too cynical to forego the service of a man who could be useful to him for the sake of cherishing a private spite. The hireling was recalled and forgiven and placed as a spy in the Secret Service, that brothel and gambling-den of politics in which the fate of a ministry is often decided. Thus employed, he wandered for six years over the face of Europe, pursued by debt and contempt, and dragging after him wherever he went a long, noisy train of infamy, eloquence, and mystery.

But degradation failed to humiliate or obloquy to annihilate him. In making him its enemy society had given him something to live for—revenge. Doomed by all the laws of circumstance and association to the galleys or the gallows, his colossal Riqueti pride had taught him how to draw the sword of Damocles from its sheath without snapping the hair by which it hung suspended over his head.

But above all was the ulcer which had consumed his

reputation kept from eating into his heart by the healing sympathy of a good woman. That this precious ointment should be contained in a box worthy of it goes without saying. Henriette de Nehra was a tall, slim girl of nineteen, with almond-shaped eyes of liquid blue, a clear, transparent complexion, and a "forest of hair *blond cendré*." Brought up in cloistered seclusion, her character, which was naturally dreamy, had, like Charlotte Corday's and Madame Roland's, been formed by the philosophic sentimentalism of Jean Jacques Rousseau, whose subtle and powerful influence penetrated even into the convents of France. But this spirit of rebellion which so profoundly stirred the pure soul of a Corday and a Roland awoke quite a different longing in the equally serious and serene one of Madame de Nehra. She, too, yearned for freedom, but it was not from the tyranny of the laws but the still more grinding tyranny of convention. Being illegitimate, she had neither the hope of an honourable marriage nor the chance of obtaining honourable consideration. The accident of birth had placed her outside the pale of respectability. She had not even the right to a name. To procure one she had been obliged to turn that of her father—Van Haren—into an anagram. Abandoned by morality, which regarded her with a callous indifference, destiny pitilessly offered her the choice of two careers—prostitution or the veil. Spotless and passionless, her whole soul revolted against both. In this distressing dilemma a slender annuity left her by her father and the shelter of the convent in which she had been brought up had enabled her to delay her choice Thus, longing for a social, as Charlotte Corday and Madame Roland longed for a political Utopia, the virginal Madame de Nehra met Mirabeau. He was her Revolution.

An imagination so susceptible to beauty and misfortune as Mirabeau's was bound to be fired by such a woman.

"'Tis Antigone's self!" he thought on first beholding her. Instinctively he recognised the vestal purity of her soul; there was something grand and restful in such purity, something heroic and devoted. What a companion for a man with all the world against him! The friendship, the sympathy of such a woman would heal his bruised heart like the tears of the gods. At the thought his blood seemed to turn to ichor, and out of the void of despair there was suddenly revealed to him, in an ecstasy, a vision of Hercules and his Club, a sign as momentous to him as had been that of the vision of Christ on His Cross to Constantine.

Mirabeau seldom failed when he sought to please. The romance in which he and all his actions were invariably clad furnished his original personality with a reference, so to speak, that curiosity is ever ready to accept. There is magic in a garment which is ever new and ever worn. It was in this enchanted apparel that he had arrived in Paris after the shipwreck of his lawsuit, in which he had lost friends, fortune, and name. To such a man so clad it was easy to seek and obtain a temporary asylum; he found it in the affections of a lady, a former school friend of Madame de Nehra's, who chanced at the moment to be visiting her. Nothing, perhaps, can better illustrate the indescribable fascination of Mirabeau for the mind or heart he sought to conquer than the effect it produced on this deeply thoughtful and self-composed girl. When she first met him he was at the lowest ebb of fortune. Never good-looking, illness and imprisonment had rendered him more ill-favoured than ever; his ungraceful body was swollen with corpulence, his scarred face bloated, the grand eyes bloodshot. A more sinister appearance never better matched a more monstrous reputation. At sight of him Madame de Nehra started back with repulsion, but, like so many others, by degrees became accustomed to his looks and even to find a peculiar beauty in them.

"How his ideas always seem to coincide with mine," she said to herself, as she found her repugnance giving place to an emotion that thrilled her in turn with terror, wonder, and resolve. "With what absorption do I listen to him! He says what I think, what I would have said had I the same faculty of expressing myself as he. Seeing that I understand him, he guesses what I have not the talent to articulate."

In a few days the attentions of Mirabeau caused a coolness to arise between Madame de Nehra and her friend. The former returned to her convent, whither Mirabeau at once followed her. For three months he came every day to talk to her through the *grille* of the convent parlour, to agitate her with hopes she had long yearned to realise, to excite her compassion, to tell her how much she meant to him.

"Dear love," he pleaded in that Orphean voice which was one day to draw all France after him, "I have only had one really happy day in my life, that on which I learnt to know you, that on which you gave me your friendship. No happiness is possible for me away from you. Every feeling, from the most trivial impression to the loftiest thought which I do not share with you is worthless. Life apart from you deprives me of what is best in myself. Were you to abandon me I might seek forgetfulness in dissipation, not to find pleasure but death!"

To the vestal behind the *grille*—a vestal nurtured on scepticism and sensibility—this *cri du cœur* was like a tocsin summoning her to liberty. But *was* it liberty? Was it not rather the brothel of tyranny to which she had been sentenced before she was born? Was not that tocsin-voice the voice of profligacy shouting to her to come into the outer darkness prepared for such as she? Accustomed to reflection and self-communing, she hesitated. Let the voice peal!

"The world is against us, Henriette, against you and

me. It has driven us from out its care. With a flaming sword the Angel of Derision is standing at the gate. He is not to be bribed to let us enter once more. Though you offer him the dazzling pearl of your virtue and entreat him for years of years you shall not enter. Have pity on me, Henriette! I, like you, have been driven out; I, like you, cannot enter; I, like you, am the slave of a cruel destiny. Everything calls us to one another, our hearts need each other. If you may not be my wife, be my comrade. Together only is there hope for us of happiness!"

Again and ever again that golden tocsin-voice. Supposing it *did* call to liberty! Supposing it should suddenly cease to peal! Supposing she who had heard it were left clinging to the bars of a convent *grille*, like another Danaë into whose cell no golden divinity should ever more descend! And Madame de Nehra made up her mind.

"I vow to live for you alone," she said solemnly, on quitting her convent to join him in his flight to England. "I vow to follow you everywhere, to brave all if I can be of use to you, in good fortune or in bad!"

For five years Madame de Nehra kept her word, and by the purity of her devotion helped to keep alive the good in Mirabeau during this period of vagabondage.

That she should have been disillusioned goes without saying; dreams such as hers and Charlotte Corday's are never realised. It was no ordinary love she had longed for, but something so elevated and ideal that, perhaps, she herself could not have defined it. Nor had Mirabeau even an ordinary love to give her; Sophie had consumed his heart in the burning marl of her passion. He had been drawn to Madame de Nehra as a tired child is drawn to its nurse: he knew that from her he would get trust, candour, sympathy, strength. She was to him a good genius, nothing more; and as such she followed him like some impalpable spirit, some vague Providence,

rather than as a woman magnificently alive. At last Mirabeau affronted her as a man may affront even his guardian angel, and she withdrew from his life, regarding him from afar with the brave regret with which Madame Roland regarded *her* Revolution when she no longer controlled it.

Perhaps Madame de Nehra too might have been a priestess of liberty had she been honestly born. There is a divinity in liberty which cleanses all who profess it from sin, the strange divinity that kept the murderess of Marat innocent and the mistress of Mirabeau chaste!

In 1786, when the death of the aged Frederick the Great was daily expected, Mirabeau was sent to Berlin to "watch" secretly on behalf of the French Cabinet the changes that occurred on the accession of the new sovereign. He started at a moment's notice, accompanied by Madame de Nehra, whom he had not yet tired of, and arrived in Berlin before Frederick's death, the news of which he managed to procure and despatch to Versailles before it was known to the public.

This journalistic feat was, however, all that he accomplished, although he remained nearly a year in Berlin. By a book on the "Prussian Monarchy" he had lost the talent he had displayed on a previous occasion of insinuating himself into the good graces of high personages. Brilliantly and sanely written with the view of winning the forgiveness of his father, this book had offended the Prussian King, who was but waiting for some excuse to order the author out of his dominions. This opportunity Mirabeau unsuspectingly himself gave him; for learning the cause of the disfavour into which he had fallen, he sought to explain his conduct in a letter addressed to the new King. His letter was taken as an unwarrantable familiarity and he was ordered to leave the country within twenty-four hours.

He well knew that the signal failure of his mission which such a decree signified would cut the ground he

had been so laboriously gaining from under his feet. The Minister he served at Versailles would fling him aside like an old glove, and he would be obliged once more to return to the starvation wages of a degraded hack writer.

But the time had passed when Mirabeau could be kicked by the world with impunity; much had happened since the door of Respectability had been slammed in his face. In France the tables were turning, and it was now Respectability that was to be spat upon and persecuted. Everything seemed to indicate the near approach of the General Overthrow that the old Marquis de Mirabeau had been prophesying to deaf ears for the last forty years. In the provinces the misery had become as vast as the Atlantic and as deep. How long, men had begun to ask, would that ocean remain calm? In the cities the discontent was openly expressed; in the councils of the King the confusion was incredible. Something had happened, just what, or when, or how, only very few like the Marquis de Mirabeau knew. But it was evident to the dullest that a great crisis was coming; the foundations of society were tottering. A lawsuit over a necklace had dragged the very throne into the criminal courts!

In this atmosphere of unrest Mirabeau too had become restless. From the hope that Madame de Nehra's influence had restored to him there had sprung ambition. Wary and alert, he was waiting for the coming crisis with the audacity of a man conscious of his power. He had scarcely received the order to leave Prussia when he learnt that, after nearly two centuries of despotism, a King of France had issued a decree summoning a States General.

"Let me hasten," he shouted in his triumphant theatrical fashion to Madame de Nehra, "for the horizon is becoming black!"

He arrived in France to find the whole nation thrilled

with an indescribable enthusiasm. To the adventurer it was like the surf breaking on the shore—the surf of democracy on the shore of despotism. A strong and fearless swimmer diving into those billows would be borne far—to the very steps of the throne perhaps! In a word, to make that vast enthusiasm serve his own ends was what Mirabeau desired, what he resolved to essay.

There never has been a time in the history of mankind that men have not desired and resolved to control popular enthusiasm. It is the only plane on which the noblest virtue and the basest vice alike meet. On such occasions the difference between the private ambition of a man and the public ambition of a party is only to be distinguished *with perfect honesty* provided the prejudiced opinion of morality, that vulgar and mediocre justice which adapts itself to every age and every clime indiscriminately, is unexpressed. To justify ambition is always questionable; men seldom do, parties always. By its contempt of public morality private ambition at least escapes the suspicion of cant, envy, and insincerity. It is an asset of considerable value in the balance-sheet of a nation.

Mirabeau belonged to those who do not explain their actions. He was frankly individualistic; he intended to make use of the passion of liberty that he clearly discerned in the popular enthusiasm for two reasons—to gratify his ambition and his revenge. He wanted to be powerful from vanity and a sense of superiority; he loved liberty from the generosity of his temperament. Had life run smoothly with him, it is likely his desire for power would have been satisfied with office, and that his love of liberty would have expressed itself philosophically in books. But ignominy taught him revenge, which fired ambition and gave to passion a principle. Society having made him its enemy, he determined to become its master. It had tried to terrorise him with injustice, oppression, and intolerance; he would terrorise it with liberty. It

was not till he had been the retribution of Old France that he tried to be its regeneration.

In his struggle for supremacy Mirabeau was quite without scruple. Knowing well that in the excited temper of the country a *lettre de cachet*, though justified, would be out of the question, he had the audacity to publish his secret correspondence with the Cabinet while at Berlin. In the midst of the noise made by this impudent treason, which, being palpably intended as an insult to the Government, was readily applauded and condoned by the People, Mirabeau arrived at Aix and offered himself to the nobility of Provence as their representative in the States General. He was unanimously and haughtily rejected as an "enemy of the public peace." This was precisely what he had expected and wished. It was now that he made capital out of the love of liberty he had preached during the last five years in countless books, tracts, and pamphlets which had received a wide *réclame* from the notoriety of his reputation. Cast out by his own class, he offered himself to the People with all the prestige that the rejection by a privileged class of a man of his political principles gave him.

The speech he made on leaving the meeting of the Provençal nobles served as his election address to the Third Estate.

"In all countries, in all ages," he perorated, "aristocrats have implacably persecuted every friend of the people. If by some singular combination of fortune there chanced to arise such a one in their own circle, it was he above all whom they struck at, eager to inspire wider terror by the very elevation of their victim. Thus perished the last of the Gracchi. But he, being struck by a mortal stab, flung dust towards heaven and called on the avenging gods. From that dust sprang Marius—Marius, not so memorable for conquering the Cimbri as for overthrowing in Rome the power of the *noblesse!*"

The expression of the old lyrical instinct was long

dead in the people of the South. But buried in the Plutonian shades of a grim and hopeless tyranny, Memory, like a spirit beyond the Styx, still recalled the songs of the troubadours, the voices of the minstrels. Into this grave of poetry, this hell of despotism, the magical voice of Mirabeau descended and woke dead hearts to life and hope. And by the grand lilt of his oratory, the grand passion of its meaning, he drew all Provence from its sepulchre into the light. Wherever he went he received an ovation. His passage from place to place was a triumphal procession. Crowds assembled under his windows and besought him to speak. The long contempt of Respectability turned to terror ; it trembled at the sight of this monster with the Melibœan voice as if it had beheld some frightful portent. The nobility, to which he belonged by right of birth, saw in him its Coriolanus. The Court of Love, so soon to be scattered by the fire and sword of the Revolution, compared him to a mad dog.

"If I am a mad dog as they call me," said Mirabeau, who with his "terrible gift of familiarity" had taken the People into his confidence and reported to them all that was said or done against him, "it is all the more reason to elect me, for despotism and privilege shall die of my bites! Hate oppression as much as you love me and you shall no more be oppressed!"

He left no stone unturned to secure his election, knowing that now or never was his chance to rehabilitate himself. As in his struggle for existence he had recoiled from nothing that might bring him bread, so there was now no artifice too undignified for him to reject. He had lived too long in contempt, in the full view of the public, to feel any delicacy in his dealings with the public. Playing to the gallery, to one with his theatrical instinct, was both easy and natural. He did not hesitate to write his own puffs. One, placarded over Aix, was as follows :

"Provence was enslaved. The Comte de Mirabeau appears and she is free. He is the most eloquent man of his age. Public assemblies are swayed by his voice as the waves are hushed by the crash of thunder. His courage is even more astonishing than his ability. No person on earth could make him belie a single one of his principles. His public life has been a series of struggles and triumphs in the cause of liberty."

His chance of success increased every day. On the eve of the election the mob, transported by the parade of his raillery and eloquence, carried him on their shoulders to the house of the Marquis de Marignane, where his wife lived. They implored her in vain to show herself and to return to him.

"The Riquetis are too fine a race to be extinguished in our Provence!" cried a peasant under the windows.

It was all that the orator could do to prevent his infuriated followers from breaking into the house and compelling the terrified Comtesse to obey them.

The next day both Aix and Marseilles elected the pariah-aristocrat to represent the People in the States General. He gave his preference to the former without wounding the susceptibilities of the latter.

CHAPTER III

HERCULES FINDS HIS CLUB

A MONTH later the States General assembled at Versailles.

The excitement of the nation was unparalleled. Never before in the history of the world had the expectation of an entire race been so concentrated and intense, the enthusiasm so sublime. Not even the Court, which, threatened with bankruptcy, at once longed for and dreaded the assistance it had summoned, could escape the infection of the national fever. Impressed with the importance of the occasion, it sought to invest it with all the dignity and ceremony of which it was the master.

The opening of the States General was fixed for the 5th of May—the 5th of May, 1789. On the evening of the 3rd the Mass of the Holy Ghost was solemnly sung at Versailles in the presence of the Court. The next day the twelve hundred deputies, headed by the King, the Queen, and the royal family, marched through the streets of Versailles from the church of Notre Dame to the church of St. Louis. The announcement that this procession would be the only event in connection with the opening of the States General in which the public might take part had attracted an immense multitude. The streets, lined with troops and hung with tapestries, could not contain the crowds. Every window was filled, every balcony crammed ; every tree was a hive, every roof a warren of human beings.

On the passage of the royal family there were cries of "*Vive le Roi!*" mingled with murmurs and shouts of "*Vive le Duc d'Orléans!*" This was evidently intended, and so taken, as a direct insult to the unpopular Queen, whose hostility to the first prince of the blood was well known and resented by the mob. At no point along the route was there a single cry of "*Vive la Reine!*" Misfortune had not yet accustomed Marie Antoinette to conceal her emotions; to the delight of the people, at the first cheer given for the Duc d'Orléans she was seen to be visibly affected. But almost immediately she recovered her dignity and continued on her way coldly and haughtily.

Among the cloud of courtiers, ministers, and deputies that followed behind the royal family two men alone attracted universal attention—the first was Necker, the second Mirabeau. The former received an ovation, for it was known that he had advised and urged the King to summon the States General. His, however, was to be the first reputation sacrificed on the altar of the Revolution. A year later he was to flee for his life in disguise! The reception of Mirabeau, whose sarcasms were destined to profane this popular idol, was even more remarkable. But where cheers greeted the intoxicated ears of the Swiss banker-minister there was a hush at the sight of Mirabeau. Though but very few had ever seen him, every eye singled him out from among the six hundred deputies of the Third Estate as if by instinct. No one had need to ask who he was. He was known by the curiosity, the disgust, or the shudder he inspired. His name alone was distinguished from among all those of the six hundred representatives of the People by the noise it had made. Everybody had heard of his strange career, starred by so many adventures, passions, and persecutions, exaggerated by rumour into so many vices, infamies, and crimes.

"That is Mirabeau!" murmured a woman to a companion as he passed with his immense mane of hair,

his lion-like head, his pitted and bloated face, his corpulent and clumsy body. "Yes, that is Mirabeau!" was the silent and universal echo of every heart. And a feeling of terror strangled the cheers for Necker and gave to the passage of Mirabeau the majesty of unlimited power—the power of Nemesis marching in the midst of the Third Estate and making of the royal pageant a splendid mask.

The next day, with still greater ceremony, the States General assembled to receive the sanction of the King to begin the work for which they had been convened. As if it had unconsciously attired itself for death, the Court displayed itself for the last time in all its pomp. The Salle des Menus, which had been selected as the home of the young Parliament, presented a magnificent spectacle. The King himself had superintended the decorations, and as if to give it all possible dignity and solemnity, the throne, flanked by two rows of Ionic columns, was elevated on a richly ornamented daïs over which hung a gilded canopy. Beside it was an armchair upholstered with *fleur de lis* for the Queen; on the steps, arranged in the order of precedence, were *tabourets* for the princes and princesses of the blood. At the bottom of the daïs were seats for the Ministers; on their right were the chairs of the *noblesse*, on the left those of the clergy. In the body of the hall and at some distance from the throne were benches for the Third Estate.

The representatives of the nobility appeared first and took their places. They formed a brilliant group, with their cloth-of-gold coats, their lace cravats, and their plumed hats turned up in the fashion of Henri Quatre. Then came the clergy—crimson cardinals, violet bishops, and black abbés. The Third Estate came last; modest and unpretentious in their attire, they were none the less conspicuous by their striking contrast to the other orders. The lights in the rock-crystal chandeliers suspended from the ceiling encrusted with gold fell full upon them.

When the deputies and the Ministers were seated the King, the Queen, and the Court appeared. As the King mounted his throne cries of "*Vive le Roi!*" resounded from the galleries, which were crowded with spectators. The entire States General rose to their feet and remained standing till the King was seated.

When the applause which had greeted his arrival had died away Louis XVI., uncovered and standing in front of the throne, read with emotion the speech that had been prepared for him. Long and eagerly expected, it was heard in silence, and by the Third Estate with a keen disappointment. It said nothing. But the King on coming to the end of it, as if he noticed the depressing effect it had produced on the representatives of the people, added, in words which came direct from his heart:

"All that can be expected from the dearest interest in the public welfare, all that can be required of a sovereign, the first friend of the people, you may and ought to hope from my sentiments. That a happy spirit of union may pervade this assembly, gentlemen, and that this may be an ever memorable epoch for the happiness and prosperity of the kingdom, is the wish of my heart, the most ardent of my desires. It is, in a word, the reward which I expect for the uprightness of my intentions and my love of my subjects."

Prolonged applause followed this peroration, during which Louis resumed his seat on the throne.

In the speech of Necker which followed, however, its effect was entirely lost. The Minister uttered for three hours a farrago of finance and morality. His speech was at once a budget and a Bible. "Nothing," he said, "can be accomplished without public economy and private morality." The King and Court listened to him with undisguised fatigue, the nobility and clergy with contempt, the Third Estate with restlessness that scarcely concealed their vexation. When Necker had

ceased the King rose and put on his jewelled hat, and, followed by the Queen, the princes of the blood, and the Ministers, prepared to descend the daïs and depart. Imitating the example of the nobility and the clergy, the Third Estate covered themselves. At the sight of this unprecedented breach of etiquette a voice from the gallery shouted, "Hats off!"

Instantly Mirabeau sprang to his feet, and, addressing his comrades, cried in a loud and insolent tone, "Hats on!"

For a moment or two this discordant cry and its counter-cry, taken up by hundreds of voices, rang through the Salle des Menus. The King, as if he had received a blow, faltered back towards his throne. He seemed unaware of the cause of the tumult, and, still covered, glanced appealingly round the hall, hoping by his very kingship to obtain silence. But the shouts still continued, and above them rose the voice of Mirabeau, crying with infinite mockery:

"Behold the victim already adorned for the sacrifice!"

The King's brother approached him and whispered a word in his ear. Louis removed his jewelled hat. At once all uncovered, and, as if by magic, order was re-established, whereupon the King instantly withdrew. But the etiquette of Versailles had received its death-warrant. The States General had unconsciously passed its first measure.

Six weeks later, on the 20th June, on repairing to the Salle des Menus as usual, the members of the Third Estate found the doors closed. From within came the sound of hammering. The deputies of the People were informed that their hall was in the possession of carpenters, who were making some necessary alterations for the better accommodation of the States General. Staggered by what they quickly realised was a *coup d'état* of the Court, they formed a pitiful and ridiculous little troop as, huddled together in a pouring rain, they consulted among

themselves as to what they should do. But not even this consolation was left them, at least in front of their former home. As they showed no disposition to disperse, the guards rudely drove them from the doors. The timid were for throwing up the sponge and acknowledging the superiority of the forces against which, from the opening of the States General, they had been contending. These were, however, in a minority which finally dwindled to one. It was agreed that they should assemble somewhere. But where ? Some suggested marching to Paris, others to Marly, where the Court then was, and deliberating under the windows of the King. Dr. Guillotin, a mild-mannered old man, whose name was to become synonymous with the scaffold, suggested that they should repair to a building long unused, known as the Tennis Court. The proposition was well received and the deputies at once proceeded there, accompanied and encouraged by an enormous and sympathetic mob. They had no sooner arrived at the old dilapidated Tennis Court than one of the deputies, Mounier, with sudden inspiration, proposed that they should call themselves the National Assembly and swear never to separate until they had given France a constitution.

This famous Oath of the Tennis Court, as it was termed, was taken by each of the six hundred members of the Third Estate in the presence of a vast throng of people who sealed it in the name of France.

"And now," said the Abbe Siéyès, "we are what we were yesterday. Let us resume our deliberations."

But the Court, which for six weeks had been endeavouring to sow dissension among the orders and to turn the States General into contempt, exasperated by the failure of its *coup d'état* to disperse the obnoxious Third Estate, prepared another and bolder stroke. The Comte d'Artois, the haughtiest of all the princes of the blood and the leader and organiser of the Court party, insolently sent word to the self-styled National Assembly that they

must vacate the Tennis Court on the morrow, as he wished to play.

The next day, therefore, the deputies once more find themselves in the streets. They apply at the monastery of the Récollets for shelter. It is refused. Paris now, as well as Versailles, is aflame with indignation. The feeble *coups d'état* of the Court fail to inspire terror. Nothing is heard on all sides but threats against the Queen, who is held responsible for the insults levelled at the People. In the Château of Versailles itself there are two parties. The order of the clergy splits in twain : the curés desert their bishops and cardinals and join the deputies of the People; with them is Talleyrand, the Bishop of Autun. Their example is followed even in the order of the nobility : Lafayette, the French translation of Washington, and the brothers de Lameth, the parents of the Jacobin Club to be, are among the nobles who forsake the Court. And as with the curés had gone forth a bishop, so with the nobles went a prince of the blood, the Duc d'Orléans—Égalité to be ! The National Assembly, remembering its solemn oath of the previous day, not only refuses to disperse, but by the aid of the clergy who have joined its ranks takes possession of the Church of St. Louis. It is an impressive moment. The temple dedicated to St. Louis is at once converted into a temple dedicated to the Fatherland. The National Assembly deliberates in the nave.

The Court, having tried two *coups d'état* without success, now prepares a third, in which the folly of the others becomes superlative. The King, instructed by his violent brother the Comte d'Artois, sends word to the deputies that they may return to the Salle des Menus, and that on the morrow he himself will join them. Carried away by their victory, the deputies fall into the trap prepared for them. On arriving at their old home they find the King already there, booted and spurred. Once more he reads the speech prepared for him, and which ends

with this despotic challenge : " If you abandon me in my enterprise I alone will effect the welfare of my people. *Alone, I shall consider myself their true representative.*"

After this tactless speech Louis surveyed his audience as if surprised at the sullen silence with which it had heard him. Perhaps some ember of the old Bourbon sense of authority flamed in him—some old hot ember raked to life by the spirit of resistance that defied him.

" And now, gentlemen," he added, " the sitting is at an end for to-day. I order you to disperse immediately till to-morrow."

So saying, he left the hall. Those of the nobility and clergy who were still loyal to the Court obeyed him. But all the others remained seated and silent, trembling with indignation and fear, for it was known that the hall was surrounded by body-guards. Suddenly the silence was broken by the impassioned voice of Mirabeau.

" Gentlemen," he cried, " the pomp of arms is resorted to to command us to be happy ! Who gives this command ? Who makes these imperious laws for us ? He who should rather receive them from us, to whom twenty-five millions of men are looking for certain happiness, because it is to be consented to, and given, and received by all ! But the liberty of discussion is chained. A military force surrounds us. Where are the enemies of the nation ? Is Catiline at our gates ? I demand in the name of the People, whose servants we are, that we keep our oath not to separate until we have given France a constitution ! Furthermore, I propose for our safety that we declare ourselves inviolable, and that whoever lays hands on a deputy of the National Assembly is an infamous traitor worthy of death."

There are moments in the lives of men, and of nations, when the desire for a leader becomes so desperate that if it is not realised, such men and such nations sink into a fatal lethargy, an all-absorbing melancholy. Such a moment had now come to these deputies, to France. Sent

to perform a colossal task, for which they had only their enthusiasm to recommend them ; drawn from obscurity into dazzling prominence ; overawed by the pomps of etiquette and tradition ; now bullied by threats, now cheered by the sympathy and applause of the People, the deputies of the National Assembly had for the last six weeks been unconsciously looking for some one to advise them, to lead them, to be their voice and brain. From the very first they had all recognised the ability of Mirabeau, but the character of the man had disgusted them, his looks terrified them. What was he doing in the midst of the Third Estate, this aristocrat ? To accept him was to be polluted with his infamies, to excuse them was to uphold them. Men had drawn away from him when he approached ; he had been cut when he tried to form an acquaintance, hissed when he had tried to speak. He was like some horrible cancer that was eating the honour of the nation ; but for the constitutional struggle with the Court, all the orders would have combined to unseat him. But Mirabeau, knowing his power, and convinced by his vast knowledge and experience that the country was on the brink of revolution, had coolly bided his hour.

"There will come the time," he told himself, "when they will listen to me, all, all—Court, Assembly, and People. The revolution, like the Messiah, is able to free lost souls."

And now his hour had come !

For the first time since the opening of the States General no hisses had interrupted his words. The eyes of the entire Assembly were glued to him. A marvellous transformation seemed to them to have come over him. What a wonderful dignity his form possessed ! What a dazzling and commanding intelligence rayed from those splendid flashing eyes ! What force, what vigour, in that great lion-like head, in that thick Samsonian hair ! And what a voice ! As if by a miracle all the horror, or contempt, or loathing he had inspired was turned to

awe—the awe of majesty. The hearts of the deputies, beaten by his words, vibrated like a drum. And yet the wonderful change which had taken place was not in him, but in them. He had merely voiced what each one thought, what no one had the courage or the talent to utter.

The impression he had created was still vivid, the echo of his thunder still lingered in the hall, when the doors that had closed behind the departing King were opened and the Master of Ceremonies of the Court of Versailles entered. The Marquis de Brézé was a young noble whose face and form, whose air and apparel, were the very last and most refined expression of the exquisite grace of the *régime* to which he belonged. Never did Mercury descend from Olympus more imposingly, more seductively. Advancing with an air of deference, which was full of dignity, to the President of the Assembly, he said in a low tone, but distinct enough to be heard by all the deputies, whom his presence at such a moment had hushed into an eager expectancy :

"Sir, you heard the King's order ?"

The words fell from his lips musically. There was a captivating suggestion of entreaty in them ; they sounded less like a command than a prayer. Standing there in all the glamour of tradition which all still venerated, emanating from his brilliant and attractive person all the perfume of the monarchy which still appealed to all, he was the siren of despotism endeavouring to lure the crew of the ship of revolution overboard. To the deputies, till so recently accustomed to obey the will of an august sovereign, the temptation to yield was very great. Shut up in that hall, surrounded by bayonets, and cut off from the populace from whom they had drawn their inspiration and courage, to resist seemed not only useless but impossible. And yet ? To yield was slavery and ignominy. Dared they spurn this glittering Mercury, this soft velvet glove thrown as a challenge by an iron

hand? Instinctively the whole Assembly turned by a sudden impulse to where Mirabeau still stood, transfigured by the ardour of enthusiasm, the passion of ambition, the consciousness of power.

He needed no second, no plainer invitation, but instantly seizing the sceptre that opportunity and his own personality had given him, he strode forward till he stood face to face with the King's messenger, and, confronting him with sublime dignity, thundered out in his powerful voice:

"We have heard the intention suggested to the King, and you, sir, who can never be the intermediary between him and the National Assembly, you who have here neither place nor voice, nor right to speak, you are not the man to remind us of his speech. Go, tell those who sent you that we are here by the will of the People and that only bayonets can drive us hence!"

De Brézé was for the first time in his strange existence disconcerted. Without a word he withdrew, bowing and walking backwards as was his custom before the King, thus rendering from habit to the new royalty which Mirabeau had just created the etiquette due to the old that the representative of the People had dethroned!

"And now, gentlemen," said the tribune, when de Brézé had vanished, "let us continue our deliberations!"

From that moment the Assembly and all France, as soon as rumour could spread the news, recognised their leader, their true sovereign; thrilled with a confidence which not even the solemn Oath of the Tennis Court had inspired, the deputies, as if unmindful of their danger, calmly turned to their business.

They were not interrupted again. The populace of Versailles, swollen by recruits from Paris to the number of five thousand, had assembled threateningly around the palace. In such a crisis not even the autocratic Comte d'Artois dared advise the King to clear the Salle des Menus at the point of the bayonet, lest the troops should

join the mob. King Louis, on receiving the answer of King Mirabeau, merely said with a tired air : "Very well, let the representatives of the people alone."

The safety of the Assembly was thus not only assured, but it had gained a great victory over the Court—a victory in which the chief symbol of sovereignty had fallen into its hands, the sceptre of authority.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST KING OF THE REVOLUTION

FRANCE was divided henceforth into three great militant and hostile camps — the Court, the National Assembly, and the People. Each represented three different ideals, to realise which they were quite ready to destroy themselves. The Court stood for reaction, revenge, and absolutism; the Assembly for change, reform, moderation, and freedom with restraint; the People for revolution, rebirth, and freedom from all restraint. Each of these parties was likewise divided into three factions: each had its Right, its Centre, and its Left—its policy of conciliation, conciliation on certain conditions, and conciliation on no condition whatsoever. The Court and the Assembly, though vanquished, were never wholly exterminated, and it was their phœnix-like capacity of recreating themselves out of their own ashes that was the Satan of the Revolution, the devil that possessed the nation till Napoleon exorcised it with grape-shot.

The reign of the National Assembly was troublous. The necessity of protecting itself from conspiracy prevented it from performing a duty that it considered not only of the first importance but the sole object of its existence—the duty of giving France a Constitution. On June 30th, within one week of the day on which Mirabeau had wrested the sceptre from the Court, the people of Paris broke into the Abbaye and set the

prisoners free. A week later the Court, taking advantage of the difficulties with which this tumult, so opposed to all the principles of the Assembly, surrounded its enemy, drafted several regiments of foreign lines into Versailles to overawe the Assembly, and on July 11th banished Necker, who was a sort of mayor of the palace or viceroy of the allied Assembly and people. Judging that its manœuvre, by the alarm it created, was successful, the Court followed it up on the 12th by another. Foulon, the Court's commander-in-chief, surrounded Paris; Berthier, his son-in-law and "right arm," cut off its supplies, and the Prince de Lambesc entered the capital with a foreign regiment to demand the submission of the People. Menaced by a common peril, the National Guard, the troops of the Assembly, and the People forgot their differences, and engaging Lambesc, utterly routed him, whereby Foulon was obliged to raise his siege and Berthier to release his captured supplies. Intoxicated with this victory and impatient of the Fabian tactics of the Assembly, which was too cautious to run the risk of defeat by advancing against the foreign regiments in Versailles, the people laid siege to the Court's chief arsenal, in which its formidable artillery of prestige had been manufactured, the Bastille, and reduced it. This was on July 14, 1789—the first day of the Year One of Liberty Without Restraint.

Three nights later the Comte d'Artois left France in a haughty huff; he was followed, secretly and in disguise, for greater safety, by the Polignacs, the Vaudreuils, the Coignys, and the entire "Cabinet of the Austrian woman." This stampede of the Court after the fall of the Bastille was known as the First Emigration. Two of the fleeing Court, however, did not escape. As luck would have it, they were the very ones above all others that the People most desired to capture—Foulon and Berthier, the two most hated men in France.

"If the people are hungry let them browse grass!"

Foulon had said in the old days when the power of the Court was unchallenged, and the people had never forgotten it. "Wait till I am Minister and I will make them eat hay—my horses eat it."

And now he *was* Minister and the people had captured him in the very act of fulfilling his old threat!

Drunk with victory, they refused to listen to the suggestions of their overawed ally, the Assembly, that the captives should be tried by its judges.

"Judged!" they cried. "He has been judged these thirty years!"

So Foulon was dragged to the nearest lamp-post, and a rope was procured. Twice they hoisted him, twice the rope broke. Then they chopped off his head without more ado, and having stuffed his mouth with grass, ran to show their frightful trophy to Berthier. But Berthier would not die tamely: he seized a gun from a soldier and defended himself; instantly he was stabbed to death by a hundred hands, and his heart was torn out and flung to a dog!

Such was the *Te Deum* of the People over the prostrate Court. But this great victory of its ally only served to increase the difficulties of the Assembly. From having been menaced by the Court it now found itself menaced by the People. Imbued with the most benevolent spirit of moderation, it was placed in the horrible situation of having to choose one of two extremes. If it attempted to assert its sovereign power to punish the savagery of the People, it would be obliged to join forces with the enfeebled Court, which was hostile to liberty and panting for revenge; and if it appeared to condone murder and mob-justice, it would encourage the People to defy law and order, of which it was the champion. It attempted to evade the choice, and to display its sovereignty over the vanquished Court and the triumphant People alike, by an act, however, in which its contempt of the weakness of the former was less evident than its

fear of the latter. On the 4th of August the Assembly solemnly abolished feudalism, with all its titles, prerogatives, and privileges. But in exploding the *ancien régime* the National Assembly had forgotten to take into account the vast void that its sudden disappearance would cause, a void that, unless immediately filled, would by its irresistible magnetism draw all France into its frightful depths. A Constitution alone was capable of filling that great gap in the national life, that great gulf in the social space. A Constitution ? Where was it ?

"This is the 4th of August, and you were commanded to make it on the 5th of May last ; what, not even begun ?" And impelled by the same impulse, both the Court and the People were prepared to hurl into the abyss it had created so foolishly the Assembly itself !

On the 1st of October the King gave a banquet to his body-guards in the palace of Versailles, a famous banquet at which the fainting spirits of the Court were frenzied to a very anarchy of loyalty by Marie Antoinette and champagne. This revel of chivalry, this orgy of courage, was repeated on the 3rd, and with a foolish and fatal publicity the Court once more, and for the last time, prepared to give battle to the Assembly. But if these banquets were to prove disastrous to the Assembly, they were to be veritable Barmecides-feasts to the Court itself. On the 5th Paris marched against Versailles, the People against the Assembly and the Court. The story of this memorable day and the one which followed it is too well known to require repetition. The 6th of October, 1789, was the christening-day of the Revolution, as the 14th of July had been its birthday. It was on this day that the People snatched the sceptre from the Assembly. They had returned to Paris clothed in the purple of royalty and uttering the "I will" of the law—dragging in triumph and in chains between the piked heads of butchered body-guards the captive Assembly as well as the captive Court.

Such, in brief, was the course of events between Mirabeau's successful defiance of the King on the 23rd of June and the "General Overthrow" on the 6th of October.

In no one engaged, directly or indirectly, openly or secretly, in the struggles of these exciting three months and a half was the desire for power more intense than in this adventurer. Had the Assembly continued to regard him as its captain-general after the 23rd of June, his ambition would have contented itself in attempting to entrench the victorious party, of which he was the loyally-acknowledged leader, in an inexpugnable position. But the Assembly dispensed with his services the moment its danger had passed. In the hour of victory it was an intolerable humiliation to realise that it was to Mirabeau to whom it owed its triumph, a man whom it had treated with derision and contempt. To turn itself into his obedient slave, to offer him its purple—the only reward he would accept—was impossible, and the sense of its own ingratitude but made him who pricked it the more hateful.

Lusting for power, Mirabeau cared not the least where he found it. Had there been the slightest chance of finding it in the Court he would have forgiven it the treatment it had inflicted upon him. Revenge died in him the moment he had satisfied it—its very ashes were cold ; even the humiliation of the haughty Court excited in him a sort of pity. But the Court had no power to give any one anything. So Mirabeau turned to the People. His clear understanding made it easy for him to predict their eventual triumph ; the fall of the Bastille had convinced him of it. Between this date and the 6th of October he was the only man in all France who had eyes that saw.

In courting the People, Mirabeau was greatly favoured by circumstance and chance. He professed sympathy for the populace and sought the applause of the mob

before his imitators and the progress of the Revolution had made such methods suspicious. He fanned the popular mistrust of the Assembly, and he had the good luck to suffer a bereavement at a most opportune moment, whereby he had an excuse for avoiding all participation in an event of which the issue was not only doubtful but compromising. This event was the manœuvre of the Court to conquer Paris by the aid of Lambesc's foreign troops, or to starve it into subjection by the aid of Foulon and Berthier. The bereavement, which, by occurring on the 11th of July, the day before Lambesc and his Germans entered Paris, happened most opportunely for Mirabeau, was the death of his father. There was something, indeed, doubly opportune, something prophetic, in the sudden passing of the old Marquis de Mirabeau at such a moment. It was as if he had *stopped* on the very eve of the Revolution that he had predicted all his life, the Revolution in which Old France, past all cure, was to expire.

"If the Court wins," said the new chief of all the Riquetis as he rushed off to Argenteuil, where the old chief lay dead, "I shall not be implicated in the ruin of the popular cause, and if the Assembly and the People win, I have the most plausible excuse for my absence from the struggle. In either case I remain uncompromised."

It was perhaps but natural that selfish considerations should obtrude upon Mirabeau at an hour so crowded with destiny. To all his children, save Madame du Saillant, the Marquis had been as good as dead for years, but though Mirabeau undoubtedly thought more of himself and his future than of the loss of a father who had persecuted him with such implacable cruelty, and to the last regarded him with a crabbed contempt, the grief he manifested was not altogether affected. He was not the man to pretend a regret he did not feel when necessity no longer compelled him; for the rest of his

life, whenever he spoke of his father, it was with unfeigned admiration, and in his will he desired that he should be buried beside him.

Be this as it may, it was entirely of himself that Mirabeau thought when he returned to Paris a week later. What chance was there for his ambition in the complete change in the life of the nation that the fall of the Bastille had wrought? Had his absence at so critical a time dimmed the prestige of his reputation as a friend of the people? Had another and more cunning tribune arisen out of the ashes of the Bastille to champion liberty?

To these questions he got a most eloquent answer on the site of the once formidable fortress itself. With the deliberate intention of gauging the temper of the People towards him, he drove to the field of their great victory, to which all Paris had been drawn in a spirit of pious patriotism. He was instantly recognised, and the vast multitude wandering over the ruins of the Bastille struggled to catch a glimpse of the man whose message to the Court on the 23rd of June had become classic, the man who in saving the Assembly had saved them as well. Given curiosity, it was a simple task to one with his indescribable "gift of familiarity" to turn it into enthusiasm. Shaking hands with the workmen engaged in demolishing the dungeons, talking and laughing with those who pressed around him, he made the tour of the ruins. On departing his carriage was filled with flowers, snatched by hundreds of eager hands from the adjacent stalls—flowers that the People had intended to strew upon their glorious battle-field. He drove away in a pelting rain of roses and rapture.

From that day Mirabeau had practised all the arts of which he was the master in cultivating popularity. He courted the chiefs of the People, and with a single glance, a single word, won the heart of Camille Desmoulins. He hobnobbed with all the men,

women, and children of the sections of Paris, the rank and file of the popular army, and enchanted the petty municipal officials with his friendship. Nor did he hesitate to proclaim his entire satisfaction at the monstrous murder of Foulon and Berthier, whom he termed the "refuse of public contempt."

"If these executions," he wrote, in an open letter to his constituents, "had taken place at Constantinople, we should all have said that they were an act of popular justice in order that the punishment of a couple of viziers might be a lesson to others!"

The Assembly, which, after these "executions," had become almost as afraid of the People as it had formerly been of the Court, believed that Mirabeau was conspiring to destroy it out of revenge. Afraid to proceed against him publicly, it passed a law prohibiting any of its members from attending the meetings in the districts and sections of Paris. But this measure, which aimed at snapping the link between Mirabeau and the People, only served to strengthen it.

"What," cried Mirabeau tauntingly, from the tribune of the Assembly, "would you, who are but the representatives of the people, hold yourself aloof from the people? Pass this motion, if you dare, and I will wring tears of blood from you!"

At the sight of this man, in whose very ugliness there was some subtle magic, hurling defiance from the tribune, the whole Assembly shuddered. What if the reverberation of his threat should reach Paris!

So, too, on the abolition of titles on the 4th of August, Mirabeau had seen another and more subtle attempt to shatter his popularity. Again from the tribune he had taunted the Assembly, and refused point-blank to obey the law.

"It is not that I object to be known as Riqueti," he thundered; "in my family Riqueti is a name of even greater distinction than that of Mirabeau, but I object

to be deprived of the name by which I am known all over France, the title by which I am known to the People!"

But this foolish law, which exposed the incapacity of the Assembly, was of service to him, for it proved to his enemies how great his power had become. To the populace the Citizen Riqueti was still the Comte de Mirabeau.

Foiled in its attempts to break this man, the Assembly, now thoroughly alarmed, tried with consummate hypocrisy to conciliate him. His eloquence was admitted, his opinions were pronounced sound, and his talents and experience were lauded. Even his past reputation was condoned, for it was agreed that with the reputation it was evident he was now striving to obtain he could not afford to be unscrupulous. To fear him, then, was to insult him. Nor did Mirabeau refuse to accept this belated and doubtful homage. Conscious of his strength, he was too generous to be vindictive to those who had tried to ruin him. But he allowed nothing to swerve his ambition from the path he had traced out for it—the path to power, to the complete rehabilitation of his character and the triumph of his name.

Revolutions are non-moral; in a cataclysm the services of the vicious are as eagerly accepted as those of the virtuous. To achieve his success Mirabeau had something even greater than his gift of making friends to aid him—the notoriety and obloquy of his past! The People thought not at all about the shame attaching to his name; his degradation had no significance for them, who had been chained to it for a thousand years. The hatred of the Court, the ingratitude of the Assembly, the contempt of privileged respectability, drew the People to him out of sympathy. By his persecutions they recognised him as one of themselves. He had, too, something which they, in spite of their lion-like strength, knew they lacked—intelligence. The People longed for a brain.

To them, wandering in the labyrinth of freedom, lost in its strange mazes, light was life. Give them that and they would not haggle over the cost. The People have no false pride. When they are ungrateful it is only through ignorance.

When they marched on Versailles, Mirabeau alone of the terrified Assembly was calm and collected. He knew that they were coming to offer him a crown, a throne, and an army—the dictatorship of love.

On the 5th of October the news brought to the Assembly of the approach of Paris threw it into a panic. It fled to the palace, where the Court was preparing to defend itself. Moderation joined reaction. Had Mirabeau been bloodthirsty like Marat, or unprincipled like the Duc d'Orléans, he would have had both the Court and the Assembly strangled. He preferred to save them to adorn his triumph, to keep them alive to serve him. He advised the Assembly to return to their Salle des Menus. They obeyed him like sheep. There in their midst the People proclaimed him their king, styling him "Darling Mother Mirabeau." Immediately, like a sovereign who both understands and interprets the inarticulate wish of his lieges, he made the Court and the Assembly prisoners. It was Mirabeau who gave the order, "The King to Paris!" It was he who decreed that the Assembly was henceforth inseparable from the person of Louis XVI. The 6th of October was the day of his coronation.

The same day he entered Paris amidst such scenes as none but the peoples of antiquity have ever witnessed. He bore himself proudly and confidently as became a king, but Riqueti was nevertheless secretly perturbed. On his crown, for all the world to see, there blazed the dazzling but ominous legend, "Popularity."

CHAPTER V

TREASON À LA MIRABEAU

NO man has ever become King of the People who has not *understood* them. To aspire to the throne whose daïs is the great heart of the nation, it is not necessary to *sympathise* with the multitude—sympathy may be feigned—but it is absolutely essential to the success of the aspirant that he should be able to read the book of the soul of the people. Having done this, he may wear the crown, but before he mounts the throne and sits thereon firmly and confidently, the popular king must translate this book from the sacred tongue of thought in which it is written into the living and vulgar language of action.

All this Mirabeau thoroughly comprehended, and the grandiose ambition that had impelled him to gratify it by fair means or foul now obsessed him to justify it in like manner. He knew full well that the People had not ploughed France for his benefit, but their own ; he was merely a skilful sower they had employed to sow in the forked soil fertile seed from which they expected to reap a rich harvest. He had no other value than this to them ; it was the secret of his power over them. Quick to perceive, he was prompt to act.

"The Revolution," he declared, in language which might be termed his oath of justification, "whether one approves of it or not, is an accomplished fact. The intelligent, if they be wise, must realise that

further resistance is equally useless and disastrous. Whether one has been ardently devoted to the principles of the Court or the Assembly or the People, the object of all must now be the same—to enable the nation to recover its equilibrium. After the machine has been set going we shall be able to judge what is right and correct what is amiss."

Whatever objections the People, recently freed by their own efforts from the tyranny of the Court and the restraint of the Assembly, might have had to such a profession of faith, they nevertheless manifested their readiness to accept it as theirs. It was sufficient that it was the *pronunciamiento* of their "Darling Mother Mirabeau," whose eloquence inspired them with a perfect trust in his experience and ability. Perhaps, too, they recognised in some dim fashion that the ideal of their leader contained a fundamental truth, one of those natural laws against which even Revolution may dash itself in vain. So *to unite and to love one another* was the *mot d'ordre* after the 6th of October.

But it was easier for Mirabeau to command than to obtain the allegiance of the Court and the Assembly. To the former he was a renegade noble, to the latter a renegade deputy; both held him responsible for their humiliation, neither could forgive him; the one sullenly ignored him, the other cunningly sought his ruin. To accomplish this the Assembly continued to flatter and fawn upon him as it had begun to do before the People had brought it to Paris. It now declared that he *alone* possessed genius. It elected him President—according to its rules a temporary honour—and even desired that he should become Minister. This had been the dream of Riquetis for generations, a dream of which he had made no secret, a dream that in the hour of its own supremacy the Assembly had taunted him with cherishing from unscrupulous motives.

"Yes," he had retorted, "and if ever I become Minister

you would do well to stab me on the spot, for in a year you should all be my slaves!"

The Assembly had not forgotten this threat, and while pressing him to court the distinction that he coveted, it cunningly inserted into the Constitution that the People demanded as tribute from their captives a clause reducing the power of a minister to zero. By thus exciting and wounding his vanity, which was known to be his Achilles' heel, the Assembly hoped to strip him of power if he accepted office and of his popularity with the People if he opposed the passing into law of a clause framed to protect their liberty from the unscrupulous ambition of a treacherous idol.

From this clever snare Mirabeau was saved by a situation that, while it increased if anything his popularity, slightly diminished his prestige. There had been an emigration of the Assembly after the 6th of October similar to that of the Court after the fall of the Bastille. In the provinces deputies who had taken the Oath of the Tennis Court were kindling the fire of civil war, while others had joined the emigrant Court on the Rhine, and were preparing to invade France and march on Paris. To prove that there was a secret understanding between these declared foes of the Revolution and their hostages in Paris was easy, and with a front of brass Mirabeau struck terror into the captive Court and Assembly by persuading the People that their enemies had conspired in a vendetta to ruin him, in order that they might strike a deadly blow at those whose liberties he was defending. But though he saved his popularity in this way, he was well aware that unless he soon succeeded in justifying it, circumstances might easily, in the panic of the times, rob him of it entirely.

In such a situation there was but one thing left him—a *coup d'état.*

Among the first to recognise the superior faculties that Mirabeau had displayed was the Comte de La Marck, an

Austrian, of the princely family of Aremberg, but French by sympathy and the possession of a great estate in French Flanders, the nobles of which province had chosen him as their representative in the States General. He was one of those men whose good looks, lofty rank, genuine air, and charming and modest manners, win them the favour of all with whom they come in contact.

He possessed, moreover, a singularly chivalrous and affectionate nature. The faculty of recognising talent in others did not excite in him the least envy; on the contrary, superior abilities stirred his admiration. He was one of those who feel the need of loving the being they admire. Like all his colleagues in the Assembly, he had been prejudiced against Mirabeau, but at the first sound of his wonderful voice La Marck's repugnance was fascinated away. Frankly and fearlessly he sought the acquaintance of the adventurer. Mirabeau, though outwardly proof against the contempt, the derision, or the disgust that his reputation inspired, nevertheless bled secretly. The advances of such a man as La Marck healed all that was sore, touched all that was noble and generous in him; and he had thrown himself impulsively into a friendship which he valued far more for its own sake than for the great advantages to be derived from it.

In his intrigue for power after the fall of the Bastille he had attempted to open communication with the Court through the medium of La Marck. The monarchy was still a force to be reckoned with: though humiliated, it was not utterly vanquished; it might yet retrieve its fortune. Moreover, though he hated despotism, he was a royalist by tradition, and to serve the King had ever been the ambition of the Riquetis.

"Though you are my friend," he had said once to La Marck, "yet I feel that politically you mistrust me. Is it not so?"

"Yes, I own it," was the reply, "you and many others!"

"If that is so," continued Mirabeau, "you should be much more distrustful of those who are advising the King. The ship of state is driven by a most violent tempest and there is no one at the helm! The Assembly is staking the kingdom on a game of chance. Terror and the scaffold are the frightful luxury of a useless revolution." And he prophesied the most horrible catastrophe for the nation.

"Forgive me if I speak plainly," said La Marck, shuddering, "but how can you pretend to restore order and confidence with your party of political incendiaries?"

"It is not my fault," replied Mirabeau, "if the imbecility of the Court has forced me for my personal safety to become the chief of the popular party. Why can't, why won't the Court appreciate me?"

"You know," said La Marck, "that nobody could appreciate your eloquence more than I, but is it worthy of the calamities you have unchained on the country?"

Mirabeau put his hand on La Marck's shoulder and looked at him earnestly.

"You admit that I have power, great power," he said. "Well, the day when the King will consent to treat with me will find me devoted to the royal cause and the monarchy. But," he added impressively, "to save France there is not an hour to lose. Let them know at the palace that there are those for as well as against them!"

The Comte de La Marck had passed his whole life at Court, and his undisguised devotion to the royal family, coupled with the fact that his position as a royalist deputy in the Assembly increased his power to be useful to her, had induced Marie Antoinette—who, since the emigration of the Comte d'Artois, had become the chief of the Court party—to take him into her confidence. After the fall of the Bastille, La Marck had served the Queen in turn as spy, informer, intriguer, and adviser. Horrified by the dangers that Mirabeau

prophesied for the Court, he had urged his royal mistress to accept the aid of the renegade. But Mirabeau was the one man above all others that the Queen regarded as a personal foe. She feared him even more than she hated the Duc d'Orléans, whose ally she persisted in believing him to be, in spite of the fact that he had said that he would not have "Philippe Égalité for his lacquey." To suggest to her that Mirabeau could be other than her enemy was to take her for a fool; what more conclusive proof could she have of his extreme hatred of her than the public insults he had hurled at her from the tribune of the Assembly? Had he not, when it was proposed to decree the persons of the King and Queen inviolable, pleaded that the name of the Queen should be omitted? Had he not once even threatened her with death itself?

"I trust, M. le Comte," she said haughtily to La Marck, "that I shall never be so unfortunate as to be reduced to the painful extremity of having recourse to Mirabeau." And the Queen dismissed the subject in a manner that made further remonstrance useless.

After the attempt of the Assembly to ruin him in the eyes of the People by means of the Constitution, Mirabeau once more approached La Marck, and convinced him beyond the shadow of a doubt that he not only wished "to restore strength to the executive power," but would undertake to do so if the Court would enter into an alliance with him. The humiliation of the 6th of October had so overwhelmed the Court, and the Constitution so threatened its very existence, that La Marck did not hesitate now to entreat Marie Antoinette to grant a private interview to Mirabeau.

"Impossible, it is impossible!" she cried in a choking voice. "I cannot descend to this. How could I bring myself to meet the monster who is responsible for the Revolution? He fills me with loathing, scorn, and horror. He has been in turn a faithless son, faithless husband, faithless lover, faithless aristocrat. He has

made a reputation out of his infidelity. It determines the choice of his attitude, his *rôle*, the character of his conduct. The offer of an alliance from such a man is a gin in which he hopes to catch the King, the Court, the monarchy. I would rather die than trust him!"

Convinced that her situation was far more desperate than she had any idea of, La Marck was quite prepared to suffer the Queen's displeasure rather than abandon the only means of saving her.

"Mirabeau has great faults, in common with many other men," he said persistently, "but one rarely finds such noble qualities united in one individual. It is only after continuous and intimate intercourse with such a man that it is possible to realise how elevated are his ideas, how deep his affections. Your Majesty, this man has immense abilities and power; his eloquence alone is a sceptre, and it is at your service. I will vouch for it on my honour, on my life. But if you will avail yourself of it there must be no delay, there is not a moment to lose. Without Mirabeau, Madame, the monarchy is irretrievably lost. Be not deceived: this is no Jacquerie, no Fronde, no bread riot of the people, but a revolution!"

"Granted that the state of affairs is as serious as you say, granted that the King and I are lost, that the people hate me so that they would destroy my very corpse, is that any reason why I should put myself unreservedly into the hands of this man who has betrayed every one but yourself, every cause but his own?" And the Queen looked at La Marck as if she defied him to convince her of his friend's integrity.

"You have heard, Madame!" he replied, "of Mirabeau's struggle against fortune, of the sea of debt in which he has been all but drowned?"

Marie Antoinette assented with a cold expression of her eyes. There was nothing that she and the world had not heard of Mirabeau's past.

"Poverty is all the harder for him to bear because of

his inordinate love of luxury and the expectation of wealth of which he has three times been cheated. He was made to marry a great heiress for her money, and she has obtained a decree of separation from him and the control of her fortune. He expected one day to inherit a vast estate from his mother, and she has squandered it in a sixteen years' lawsuit with her husband. The Marquise de Mirabeau is over a million in debt! From his father he should have inherited a fortune too, but on reading the will of the celebrated Friend of Men his children were horrified to find that he had left nothing but mortgages and debts. For years, it seems, he had been dependent for the necessaries of life on his mistress, a certain Madame de Pailly, whose own small fortune he had consumed. With all his power the Comte de Mirabeau is the slave of debt, Madame."

"You mean that he is to be bought, to be corrupted?" said the Queen wearily.

"Mirabeau wishes to save the monarchy——"

"After having shaken it to its foundation!" laughed the Austrian scornfully, unmindful that the same accusation had been brought against herself, not unreasonably.

"And he has huge debts," continued La Marck without heeding the interruption; "the payment of those debts by the King, and a subsidy from the Court, are the guarantee of his honesty that you ask for. Thus bound, Mirabeau dare not be faithless. Were it known that he was in the pay of the Court all his popularity, and consequently his use to us, would vanish. Were it known that he had even contemplated an interview with your Majesty, his subjects, the people, would hang him at the nearest lamp-post!"

"Well, have your way," sighed Marie Antoinette; "I will consent to bargain with this Mirabeau for my throne." And with a gesture of impatience she dismissed La Marck from her presence.

It was much easier for the Queen to come to a secret

understanding with Mirabeau than to grant him a secret interview. Though the pomp and state with which the royal family were surrounded at the Tuileries were scarcely less majestic than the splendour in which they had lived at Versailles, their movements were under the closest surveillance. Nothing could disguise the fact that they were the prisoners of the People, the hostages of the enemies of the Revolution. For the Queen to have granted an audience to Mirabeau would have been to proclaim their alliance, to betray their conspiracy. But Marie Antoinette having once consented to accept the assistance of the idol of the People in order to escape from the terrible perils to which her policy had exposed the throne, there was nothing to prevent Mirabeau from giving the necessary guarantee of his fidelity that she demanded. The price at which he sold himself was high, but the Queen was not inclined to be niggardly in a matter of such immense importance, and considering the power of the eloquence, abilities, and personality she was purchasing, the amount paid for them was not extravagant.

"In return for the great services you have promised to render the King," said La Marck, who acted as the middle-man in this bargain, "her Majesty, fearing lest your debts, of which I have informed her, may hamper your efficiency, has authorised me to give you the sum of 200,000 livres to pay them. She also requests that you will allow her to add to this an additional 6,000 every month to cover the expense you may incur in her cause. And as, in the event of your restoring the prestige of the throne, the gratitude of herself and the King will know no bounds, they wish to testify a portion of it beforehand by asking you to accept, if successful, a further sum of one million livres."

Far from resenting this gracefully veiled demand for a pledge that should put it out of his power to betray the Court without exposing his treachery to the People,

Mirabeau hailed it with the greatest satisfaction. He needed the money; it would enable him at last to enjoy the luxury he had longed for all his life, the deprivation of which had been as tantalising to him as the water to Tantalus. The bribery it implied had no shame for him; he never gave it a thought, or if he did, he dismissed it without the least scruple. Everybody took money. Calonne and the Polignacs had emptied the treasury between them; the deputies in the Assembly took it, the very People themselves were willing to be bought. And if the spotless Lafayette, who was rich beyond the dreams of avarice, was above taking gold of which he had no need, had he not taken its equivalent, flattery and power? All sold themselves after the fashion that appealed to each; bribery was perfectly legitimate according to the moral standard of the age, and nobody dreamt of denying the charge of corruption unless there was some personal reason for doing so.

But Mirabeau took the money of the Court from another motive beside a mere shameless love of luxury. He knew the slippery and fickle nature of the Court, and he wished on his part, in the dangerous game he was playing, a guarantee of its sincerity quite as much as Marie Antoinette had desired one from him. And this the bribe he took from it supplied him with.

"I know very well," he said meaningly to La Marck, "that I am putting myself in the power of the Court, but in accepting this money from the King he has put his throne in my power as well. He fears my treachery; well, by securing himself against it I too have secured myself against his. It is as well that we should understand one another. Though sold, I am not bought. The Queen wishes to restore despotism; I only intend to restore the prestige of the throne, to save the monarchical principle. The old order cannot be restored; come what may, the liberties won by the Revolution must be maintained. I have neither the power nor the desire to

destroy them. You cannot impress this upon the Queen too strongly. Her life and the King's, no less than the throne itself, are at stake. If the Court desires my aid to prove effective it *must* follow my advice."

But this was precisely what Marie Antoinette could not bring herself to do.

"Give him money till he is gorged," she said to La Marck, "but Mirabeau in the Ministry, never!"

Nevertheless, the alliance between them had scarcely been concluded before Mirabeau was able to prove his usefulness. In the fresh conflict of the factions caused by the framing of the Constitution, from which each hoped to derive a special advantage over the others when order was restored, Mirabeau had saved for the King the prerogative of declaring war. It is true this royal right was so restricted by checks as to be practically worthless; notwithstanding, but for Mirabeau, the King would have lost even the shadow of the prerogative. It was now that Marie Antoinette for the first time seemed to realise the extreme peril of the monarchy and the value of Mirabeau. Once having admitted this to herself, she became as anxious to discuss with him in person his plans for the restoration of the dignity and authority of the throne as she had previously been averse. The Tuileries, however, continued to bristle with spies, and it was long before a favourable opportunity of meeting occurred.

At last, in the summer of 1790, nine months after the royal family had been brought to Paris, Mirabeau's influence had succeeded in relaxing the durance of their captivity to the extent of obtaining permission for them to spend a few weeks at St. Cloud. The rural situation of this palace rendered its strict surveillance difficult, and consequently the chance of a secret interview more feasible. But even so the danger of detection was very great, and to avoid arousing suspicion Mirabeau was obliged to divert from his own movements the attention

that popularity and envy alike attracted to them. To effect this he took into his confidence his favourite niece, the young Marquise d'Aragon, a daughter of his sister Madame du Saillant, with whom he had become once more reconciled. As the Marquise d'Aragon, as ardent a royalist as she was devoted to her uncle, was spending the summer at a villa in the wood of Passy, from whence there were many unfrequented lanes by which one could reach the neighbouring park of St. Cloud unobserved, Mirabeau was certain of finding in her not only a trusty but a useful accomplice. The time and place of his interview with the Queen, on which the success of his *coup d'état* depended, having been arranged, he took the precaution to ride out frequently beforehand from Paris and spend the night at his niece's, in order to accustom those who might have a motive for following his movements to his repeated absences from town.

On the eventful day in question the Marquise d'Aragon, who had previously dismissed several of her servants, invented pretexts for sending the others on various errands, and at sunset her young brother, the Comte du Saillant, who had also been let into the secret, harnessed the horses to her cabriolet, and drove up to the door of the house disguised as a postilion.

"Victor is ready, uncle!" she said. "God speed you and save the King!"

Mirabeau at once proceeded to depart, but before mounting into the cabriolet he went up to his nephew, and, placing a hand on his shoulder, said gravely:

"Victor, I would impress on you the importance of this adventure, in which so much depends on yourself. You are too ardent a royalist for me to expect you to be in sympathy with my political views, but bear well in mind what I say: In serving me faithfully to-day you are serving the interest of the King you worship. If either going to or coming from this royal assignation I am discovered, there will resound throughout France a

double cry of treason that will cause your King to lose his throne of a certainty, and perhaps also his life. Do you understand me?"

For answer the boy seized his uncle's hand and pressed it fervently to his lips.

"Now let us start!" said Mirabeau, and having turned to kiss his niece, he mounted into the cabriolet, and was driven rapidly away in the twilight of the summer day.

Half an hour later the postilion drew up his horses on the Sèvres road before a little gate almost hidden in foliage, which at the sound of wheels had opened noiselessly. Mirabeau at once alighted, and, having whispered a caution in his nephew's ear, passed into the park of St. Cloud, whereupon the cabriolet continued slowly down the road, while the Comte de La Marck, who had admitted its occupant unperceived, proceeded without delay to conduct him to the Queen.

She, in the meantime, concealed in a bower of oleanders and taxus trees with a servant who was wholly devoted to her, awaited the coming of Mirabeau with a shiver of horror and of hope. For her he was at once a Cromwell and a Monk. The name of this man, whose whole life had been an insurrection, personified to her all the humiliations she had suffered since the opening of the States General: the insolence of the National Assembly, the fall of the Bastille, the emigration of her dearest friends, the 6th of October. He was, in a word, the Revolution. And now, from the remorse of this headsman of the monarchy, from the repentance of this subject more royal than the King, came the promise of deliverance, of safety, and happiness! Was it a dream, that gay, glad life at Trianon? Or was *this* the dream? Had she ever been loved, worshipped, and adored, or always the hated and hunted Queen of a distracted kingdom, compelled as now to escape by stealth from her palace to plead and to bargain with this Samson of revolution? At the sound of steps

crunching the gravel she turned to her attendant and gave him a silent look of despair.

"Courage, your Majesty," he murmured. "You must have the grace to win him. The lion is willing to be chained."

The next moment Mirabeau entered the bower.

At the sight of the Queen against whom he had hurled insults from the tribune of the Assembly, and upon whom he had set the People as dogs are set upon rats—at the sight of this woman whom he now beheld for the first time face to face, he experienced an emotion he had not counted upon. Marie Antoinette was still beautiful. Her thirty-five years had not spoilt the *svelte* grace of her form; grief had not yet washed the blue of her native Danube from her eyes, nor had terror thinned and whitened her thick blond hair, on which a blight was to fall in a single night two years later during the fatal flight to Varennes. Conscious that she was a daughter of the Cæsars, her pride had successfully defied humiliation to break it. She still looked every inch a queen, to whom it seemed as natural to offer a throne as any other woman a chair. Nevertheless, her pale and lovely face spoke of an incessant and internal struggle with despair; of infinite sadness, of brooding care, of shattered hopes, of broken friendships and a broken heart. Though her eyes were undimmed, there were tears on her lips, in every feature, every gesture. To an imagination so vividly alive, so susceptible to impressions, as Mirabeau's it was impossible that her beauty and distress should not make a powerful appeal. His ever-generous heart was instantly touched by the pathos of her humbled greatness, and halting suddenly on the threshold of the bower, he bowed low before the Queen in an attitude that spoke louder than words of repentance and remorse.

"M. le Comte," she said in a voice full of emotion, rising as she spoke from the marble seat on which she had been sitting, and advancing towards him, "if I found

myself face to face with an ordinary enemy, a man who had sworn the destruction of the monarchy without recognising of what value it is to the nation, I should be taking at this moment a very useless step. But when one talks to *a Mirabeau* one is beyond these considerations, and hope of his aid is mixed with wonder at the act."

And Marie Antoinette welcomed and pardoned him with that exquisite smile with which, in those joyous days when "ten thousand swords would have leapt from their scabbards to avenge one look that threatened her with insult," she had won the fidelity of Fersen—that same smile with which, in the horrible days to come, when not a voice dared utter a *Vive la Reine!* she lured Barnave to the scaffold and tamed even the very butchers who guarded her in the Conciergerie into a sort of pity.

At once the loyalty of all the Riquetis throbbed in one great heart-beat in Mirabeau. The *woman* in the Queen had captivated him. Inviting him to follow her, she returned to her marble seat, and as he obeyed he beheld in the distance the towers and spires of Paris, still distinguishable in the long twilight of the placid summer evening, peeping, like some subtle flower whose perfume had poisoned this Queen whom *he* had forced to breathe it, above the leafy woods of Passy, which the silver riband of the Seine tied, as it were, into a gigantic bouquet.

"See," she said, as if she divined the rapt thoughts with which he contemplated the view, "down there at our feet is the road to Versailles."

The bower could not have been chosen more fittingly had the object been to provide the Queen with a dramatic background. Glancing in the direction she indicated, it seemed to Mirabeau's agitated fancy that he saw the ghost of her conquered Court as it had passed along that road nine months before with its escort of the piked heads of her body-guards. Never in the whole course of his sensational career had he figured in such a tableau as this. Never had he addressed the people in tones so

moving as this Queen and her surroundings spoke to him now!

For three hours Marie Antoinette remained in that bower of oleanders and taxus trees hidden in the park of St. Cloud while Mirabeau unfolded to her his plan for restoring the equilibrium of the throne he had done so much to upset. The royal family must escape from Paris to Rouen or to Metz, where, having summoned by proclamation all who were loyal and devoted to rally round him, the King must decree his fixed resolve to acknowledge the inviolability of the liberties of the people, the natural liberties of humanity, and to maintain his sovereignty. Such a bold and courageous act would raise the provinces in his defence and win the army; then, with all the forces of law and order behind him, he must summon the Assembly and the people of Paris to surrender their treasonous claim to his sceptre. If they refused, a civil war must be the last alternative, but, terrible as it was, even civil war would offer opportunities of restoring peace to the State.

"In his flight from Paris," concluded Mirabeau, "in all that will follow his flight, I promise the King loyalty, zeal, activity, energy, and courage surpassing all that can possibly be expected of me—everything, in fact, except success. For this one man can never command, and in the present critical state of affairs it would be a rash presumption for me to guarantee it."

The invincible pride of her imperial descent was to prevent the Queen to the last from accepting the inevitable as final. In the hour of her deepest humiliation, when her frustrated flight to Varennes sounded her death-knell, she refused to believe that all was lost. Barnave, the fascinating deputy sent to arrest her, was to be "pardoned when order was re-established." But while she was utterly incapable of sympathising with the principles of liberty, that, as Mirabeau declared, constituted the only possible basis on which her tottering

throne could rest secure, he had too cleverly and ornately lacquered them for her to scorn his aid. The brilliantly painted pictures with which he had illustrated his programme had distracted her attention, as they were meant to do, from its hard facts. And what pictures they were to cheer the gloomy spirits of a haughty and humiliated queen! Flight, an army, action! Already she felt that the sceptre was in her hand once more.

As for Mirabeau, inflamed by the very hopes he excited, nothing seemed easier to him than to execute all he promised. Belief in his power, born of his inherited and colossal vanity and confirmed by his triumphs and popularity, was implicit. Under the influence of a chivalrous impulse to repair the injury he had done this beautiful captive Queen, the complexion of his *coup d'état*, like himself, changed colour. Having essayed the *rôle* of General Monk, to apotheosise it was the first effort of his ardent imagination, and as he offered Marie Antoinette a constitutional throne decked with Bourbon lilies, he pictured her to himself mounted on horseback with the Dauphin in her arms, riding to victory at the head of an army which shouted "*Moriamur pro rege nostro!*" General Monk? It was rather Mazarin to her Anne of Austria that he would play!

"Your Majesty," he pleaded, flinging himself at the feet of the Queen when she at last brought the interview to an end, "when your heroic mother, Maria Theresa, condescended to favour one of her subjects with an audience, she never dismissed him without permitting him to kiss her hand."

The monster, then, was a man of sentiment and delicacy! The Queen was touched. Mirabeau on his knees at her feet, praying for her hand to kiss, impressed her imagination—scarcely less impulsive than his—more than any incident of the interview.

"It has cost me much," she said, "to meet the destroyer of the monarchy. But all is forgotten; he

has redeemed his faults by his devotion." And bidding him rise, she extended her hand.

Most theatrical when most deeply moved, Mirabeau took it respectfully in both his, and having pressed his lips to it, sprang to his feet exclaiming, in a burst of grandiose enthusiasm that transported the Queen:

"Madame, the monarchy is saved!"

The next moment Mirabeau had left the bower.

When he had gone, Marie Antoinette, exhausted with excitement, proceeded to the palace with his sublime boast still ringing in her ears, and retired to her apartment unobserved, where she was discovered a while later lying in a swoon beside the cradle of the sleeping Dauphin.

CHAPTER VI

HERCULES AND THE HYDRA

NEVER in the whole course of the Revolution had the Court a more favourable opportunity of attempting the recovery of its authority than when Mirabeau boasted to Marie Antoinette that he would "save the monarchy." His hold upon the affections of the People was never firmer, and the ability and courage which are necessary to the success of every *coup d'état* were reinforced by his boundless self-confidence. Till he had met the Queen he had regarded his alliance with the Court as a political stratagem, by means of which the advantages obtained by the Revolution could best be preserved ; its necessity was abstract and impersonal—it embodied a theory rather than an ideal, an opinion rather than an emotion. Appealing to his intelligence rather than to his heart, it lacked that element of romance which ever served as a sort of driving-engine to his energy. The impression that Marie Antoinette had produced upon his senses created that atmosphere of theatricality in which all his faculties were electrified. When he left the bower in which he had met the beautiful captive Queen, his abstract political principles had become concrete personal ones. He no longer thought theoretically of "restoring order to a distracted State by the adoption of constitutional government on the English system," but practically of "saving the monarchy." His *coup d'état* had become a chivalrous adventure.

But, when no longer under the spell of his presence, the Queen began to question the sincerity of his repentance. Forced to ally herself to a man who had humbled her to the dust, she dreaded lest the plan by which he intended to re-establish her throne should prove a snare in which it would be irretrievably lost. To Louis XVI. the idea of saving his crown by a civil war was frankly out of the question. Nor could Marie Antoinette, untroubled by any such considerations as alarmed her consort, contemplate breaking with the emigrants on the Rhine, ceasing to look for foreign intervention, or boldly trusting to the questionable loyalty of the provinces. Moreover, on sober reflection, there was a frankness, an audacity, in his plan that, to a mind so accustomed to intrigue as hers, was extremely distasteful. The more she thought of it the less she liked the idea of entrusting the dignity and safety of the throne to a dare-devil adventurer, of risking the monarchy in a wild escapade. But having placed the Court in Mirabeau's power, Marie Antoinette felt obliged to keep up the appearance of co-operating with him.

Cleverly as she deceived him, however, it was not long before Mirabeau had reason to suspect that the Penelope in the Tuileries was secretly unravelling the threads of his *coup d'état* as fast as he wove them.

"The fact is," said La Marck, to whom he complained, "your plan of restoring the authority of the throne is too tainted with constitutionalism to please the Queen. She cannot bear the idea that the King should ally himself with the people."

"It is the only way for him to preserve his crown," said Mirabeau stubbornly.

"The Queen does not think so," rejoined La Marck, and he added with a blush, as if ashamed of the confession: "She has been consulting the mesmerist, Bergasse."

"Bergasse!" echoed Mirabeau angrily. "What, I am cast aside for a Bergasse! It is inconceivable!" Then, as

if struck with the humour of the idea, he added with a laugh, "Pray, what advice does he give her?"

"That which appeals to her. She does not at all fancy fleeing to Rouen or Metz, as you suggest. Well, the mesmerist saw in a trance a scaffold in each of these towns. He advised flight to the frontiers."

Mirabeau shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"What other colleagues have I besides the mesmerist?"

"As I am known to be your friend," was the reply, "I no longer enjoy the full confidence of the Queen. But you may take it for granted that Marie Antoinette in her despair is looking for help everywhere."

"Well," said Mirabeau grimly, "what is to be her fate I know not, but if I myself escape I shall say with pride: I braved destruction to save her and she would not!"

"But you will not abandon her?" pleaded La Marck anxiously. "You will save her in spite of herself?"

"For *save*, my friend, put *serve*," said Mirabeau. "Yes, I will serve her in spite of herself. You see, the money I receive from the Court is too necessary to me to forfeit it."

And he turned away with a mocking laugh.

In the early days of the States General, when the Court and the Third Estate were struggling for supremacy, a few Breton deputies held a meeting at Versailles and formed themselves into a society to detect the *coups d'état* of the Court and to assure the triumph of liberty. They called themselves the Breton Club, but when the victory of the Third Estate over the Court metamorphosed the States General into the National Assembly, they changed their name to the "Society of the Friends of the Constitution." The realisation of their ideal had, as it ever does, cooled their ardour. They now became moderate and favoured a policy of conciliation. After

the fall of the Bastille had made the framing of the Constitution a matter of the first consequence, the club attracted considerable attention; applications for membership were numerous, and the original members, many of whom were liberal noblemen, flattered by their growing importance, readily assented to increase their numbers without considering the rank, or reputation, or political qualifications of those whom they received. Mirabeau himself had been one of those thus elected. On the 6th of October, when the Court and the Assembly were brought to Paris by the People, the club also transported itself thither, and took up its abode in the old convent of the Jacobins in the Rue de St. Honoré. Purged by an "emigration" of its conciliatory members, the "Society of the Friends of the Constitution" determined to purge itself of its former principles of moderation as well. The first thing the club did on arriving in Paris was to accept the Revolution frankly, the second to change its name. It chose that of its new home. Thus was born that famous faction which was to become more despotic than the Court had ever been, more representative than the Assembly, and more popular than the People—the Jacobins.

Formerly, to be a member of the "Society of the Friends of the Constitution" it was necessary to be a member of the National Assembly, but now the Jacobins waived even that qualification. They eagerly welcomed any one in sympathy with the Revolution who cared to join them, and in order to win the popularity they craved, they remodelled the club in imitation of the Assembly, and admitted the public to their nightly meetings. The extravagance of their debates, in which their visitors were allowed to join, soon stifled the importance of the Assembly. Stimulated by their success, they sent out missionaries to preach the gospel of the Revolution all over France—the gospel of the salvation of liberty by a baptism of blood. Everywhere the new creed was

accepted with acclaim. In every town, in every village, congregations were formed of the discontented, the ambitious, the unscrupulous, of all, in a word, who hoped to benefit by increasing the national disorder—Jacobin churches and chapels obedient to the will of the mother cathedral in Paris. There was thus formed a despotism within the Constitution, a sedition within the Revolution, insurrection within anarchy. The object of this vast conspiracy was supreme power, to be obtained first collectively and then individually—collectively, by preventing the Assembly from legislating, the King from governing, the people from obeying ; individually, by the usurpation of the power thus won by the strongest.

Between the Jacobins and the achievement of their purpose stood Mirabeau—Hercules between the Hydra and death ! To remove them from his path had been the object of his secret alliance with the Court, his *coup d'état*. To remove him from theirs they employed suspicion and denunciation, a powerful artillery with which he, with an air of grand indifference, himself furnished them by a sudden and complete change in his mode of life.

Aware of the poverty that had obliged him to dwell in a mean lodging-house, the world was surprised to find him of a sudden luxuriously installed in a fashionable quarter of the town. He who had never been known to collect anything but debts now collected gems, engravings, and books. His house in the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin was a museum dedicated to literature and the fine arts ; his entertainments were the talk of Paris ; his coach, richly lacquered with the Riqueti arms, was as gorgeous as an ambassador's. To his princely *luxe* there was no limit ; it was that of a millionaire newly made who gorges himself with ostentation to gratify his appetite for splendour. It was taken as a matter of course that he had been bought. His past reputation as a man devoid of scruple warranted this conjecture, which envy at once turned into conviction.

The world was certain that it was not from his father that he had inherited the Golconda from which he drew his revenue. The Marquis de Mirabeau had left nothing. Nor from his mother. Her vast fortune had been swallowed up in endless lawsuits; she was buried under a mountain of debt, hidden away in some attic in Paris. Nor from his wife. The heiress of the Court of Love had emigrated after the 6th of October, when the People rose in Provence and burnt the *châteaux* of the *noblesse*. Nor from his friend the Comte de La Marck, for it was unthinkable that even he, rich as he was, would maintain the Comte de Mirabeau in the extravagant style he adopted. Bought then he must be, but by whom? Not by that *fleur de lisé* Jacobin the Duc d'Orléans—he and the tribune of the People were no longer on speaking terms. By Lafayette on behalf of the Assembly? Impossible, that pattern of rectitude would have felt insulted by the suggestion. Clearly, only the Court had the money to purchase him or the use for him. Suspicion thrives on unproved facts; the inviolable secrecy that shrouded his treachery made it appear the more certain.

"Tell me," coaxed Camille Desmoulins, that spoilt child of the Revolution whom the People finally killed in a fit of passion for having taken advantage of the licence they granted him, "are you sold to the Court?"

"Come and dine with me, Camille," laughed Mirabeau, "and you shall know."

But as he vouchsafed the hero-worshipping young Republican, who declared that he "loved him like a mistress" and compared him to a saint and a demi-god, no further information than such as might be inferred from a dinner and company so choice as almost to corrupt his patriotism, Camille felt slighted and joined his enemies.

"Sold! sold! sold!" shouted a member of the Assembly once as he mounted the tribune.

"Sold!" he echoed mockingly. "If that is so, how is it that I have always been poor, having at my command so many kings and their treasures?" And he glanced significantly at the galleries, crowded as usual with his admirers, who manifested their pleasure at the compliment he paid them by loud *vivats*.

He seemed to enjoy the suspicion and the denunciation that he excited. While Marat was shrieking against the rich in his widely-read newspaper the *Friend of the People*, "Let us erect a thousand gallows and hang all these traitors with the infamous Riqueti at their head!" Mirabeau bought the dilapidated house in which his father had died at Argenteuil and converted it into a palatial *château*.

"It is very foolish to make such a parade of wealth," remonstrated La Marck, aghast at his imprudence. "Believe me, it would be safer for you to buy Versailles itself a year hence than a cottage now."

"True," laughed Mirabeau carelessly, "a tribune of the people cannot become a Lucullus without exciting suspicion. Well, I am not afraid of it. To prove whence flows the inexhaustible spring of fortune in which I delight to wallow is impossible. The secret is too well kept. Besides, of what good is money to me if I may not enjoy it? I revel in all this pomp in which I am now living. I have been poor, desperately poor, so long!"

This fanfaronade of venality, however, was less flippant than it seemed.

Convinced that no proof of his so-called treachery could ever be produced, Mirabeau desired to excite suspicion in order to discover who were his friends. At a moment when he was about to put an immense strain on the chain which united him to the People, it was most necessary that he should test its strength. If in the agitation of the times it could endure the tension of the suspicion of treason, it would bear that of his *coup d'état*.

So while he had laughed at the fears of La Marck and delighted to tease the malicious curiosity that tracked him like a footpad, he was feeling the pulse of public opinion.

Baffled by his taunting contempt, his enemies, who had been denouncing him individually for months to no purpose, at last conspired together to tear from him by a swift and bold attack the magical cloak of popularity that rendered him invulnerable. One morning on arriving at the Salle de Manège, in which the Assembly had been installed when brought to Paris, he found a threatening mob at the entrance awaiting him. As he descended from his carriage he was greeted with hisses, above which could be heard the voices of newsvendors hawking a pamphlet entitled "Discovery of the Great Treason of the Comte de Mirabeau." At the same time a brute to which the Revolution had given the name of man thrust a noosed rope in front of his face, while another showed him a pair of pistols. With a curse a *poissarde* bade him remember the fate of Foulon. Enveloped in this crowd, hired for the occasion, it seemed impossible that he should emerge from it alive. Madame de Staël, who was watching the tumult through the railings of the Tuileries gardens, expected every moment to behold his head lifted above the mob on a pike. But Mirabeau was never cooler, never more fearless than when exposed to danger.

"Here," he exclaimed to a newsvendor who was screaming the title of the calumniating pamphlet at his side, "you don't seem to be doing much business, judging from the burden you are holding, for if there is any truth in what you are hawking you should be sold out. Give me a copy." And he purchased the libel.

There was something in his name, in his history, his character, and above all in the unconscious conviction that genius inhabited his huge Medusa-head, in whose very ugliness was a mysterious power, something that in-

spired the mob with a deep curiosity to see what he would do, that guaranteed his safety. It was no Foulon, no commonplace knave, that had fallen into their clutches.

"Pshaw," he said, as he glanced over the paper, "your news is stale!" And disdainfully facing those who impeded his progress, he cried in a stentorian tone of command: "Back, back; I have work to do in the Assembly!"

"To the lantern with the traitor!" shrieked a voice. "To the lantern with Riqueti! Death to the betrayer of the people!"

"My friend," he laughed, "you can have me afterwards, but now I am going into the Assembly!"

Had he blenched, had an eyelid quivered, a muscle trembled, doubtless his spell would have been broken, his life have ebbed out there on the steps of the Salle de Manège. But his courage was more terrible than their threats: the mob slunk back as he commanded it like a whipped dog, and he passed on and took his accustomed seat in the Assembly.

"What, Mirabeau," sneered a colleague as he entered, "yesterday the Capitol, to-day the Tarpeian rock?"

When the fury of the galleries, packed by his enemies, had spent itself, he calmly mounted the tribune, and in the midst of the silence of curiosity growled out, rather than said:

"A few days ago the people sought to carry me in triumph in the very streets in which they have now been bribed to denounce me. It needed not this lesson to prove to me how short is the distance between the Capitol and the Tarpeian rock. But I am not to be intimidated; such blows aimed at me from below cannot injure me. To such assailants I merely reply: first prove my treason—if you can—then calumniate me as much as you please." And with a self-confidence that seemed almost supernatural he began to debate with his

customary eloquence the bill before the Assembly, as if further defence was both unnecessary and absurd.

The object of the bill under discussion was to deprive the sovereign of the right of declaring war. To argue, as Mirabeau did, in favour of leaving this privilege to the throne, after the attempt just made to prove his corruption by the Court, was to admit it with his own lips. Nevertheless, the peculiar honesty with which he explained his views, of which the political sagacity was as convincing as it was irritating to those who desired his ruin, made the charges against him appear ridiculous. The resolutions he proposed were carried with certain amendments, and Mirabeau left the Assembly in triumph.

The failure of this plot gave, as it were, a fresh impetus to his popularity. People stopped to stare at him in the streets or run cheering beside his carriage ; children scribbled his name on the walls ; horses and dogs were called Mirabeau, new-born male babes Gabriel or Honoré. His portraits and busts, decked with the tricolor—the flag of the People which he had vindicated and eulogised when it was proposed to substitute for it the white standard of the Bourbons—were to be seen in every shop window, to be found in every cellar and attic —Mirabeau the Saviour of the People ! His subjects cared not whether he was bribed or not ; the fact that he undoubtedly received money from some source—presumably the Court—did not shock, had never shocked any one.

" If the Court has not paid Mirabeau a hundred thousand livres for his speech to-day, it is certainly robbing him," remarked Camille Desmoulins with malicious admiration, after one of his former friend's oratorical triumphs.

To be worth purchasing was a legitimate ambition in the non-moral age in which he lived—an age which begat a Reign of Terror out of Voltaire and Rousseau, mockery and sensibility out of atheism and cant. That a Mirabeau

should take bribes was to his credit in the eyes of the People, from whose passions, unchained by a Revolution, he derived his power; they regarded the money he received as a sort of tribute paid to him for them by their vassal in the Tuileries. The popular imagination distinguished very clearly between honour that was *bought* and honour that was *sold*. For the Jacobins to succeed in destroying Mirabeau, they would have to prove not that he was corrupt, but that he was a traitor to the Revolution.

Opportunities of involving him in the detected conspiracies of others were not wanting. Months before his interview with the Queen the Jacobins had accused him of being an accomplice of the Marquis de Favras, a crack-brained royalist, who had been charged with treason and hanged on the mere suspicion of a plot to assassinate Lafayette and to abduct the royal family. The supreme disdain with which Mirabeau treated this accusation made it appear fantastic, but the Favras conspiracy was followed by numerous others of greater or lesser importance, to which the name of Mirabeau was attached in the belief that a persistent suspicion, like an oft-repeated lie, must eventually accomplish its end.

Against this Hydra that sought to squeeze him to death in its coils he fought without flinching, undismayed that for every throat he strangled there lived another to hiss "Treason!" When, however, the machinations of the Court were added to the tactics of the Jacobins, Mirabeau was obliged to admit the gravity of his position. Partly to terrify the Court into obedience, partly to free himself of all suspicion of sympathy with it, he attacked the King and Queen as "royal cattle fit for the *abattoir*," and outbid the Jacobins themselves in the zeal with which he defended the utterly indefensible riots of the populace. But the very means he employed to preserve his popularity served to increase the excitement he had hoped to quell by his *coup d'état*, and thus

provided his enemies with an unrivalled opportunity of attacking him with what seemed to them an almost certain prospect of success.

The nation at the beginning of 1791, thanks largely to the duplicity of Marie Antoinette's conduct towards Mirabeau, had got quite out of hand. The Revolution was fast degenerating into anarchy; a wave of terror passed over France, sweeping an immense multitude of persons out of the country. From Paris alone five thousand people fled in a week. In the midst of this *sauve qui peut*, which lashed those who remained into a frenzy, Mesdames, the King's aunts, departed for Rome. The daughters of Louis the Well-beloved, Louis *après nous le déluge*, had not proceeded far, however, before they were arrested by the Jacobins of an insignificant town through which they passed. The Assembly at once despatched the dashing Comte Louis de Narbonne (who was said to be the son of one of them) with an order for their release. But the Jacobins of Moret, instigated by the Jacobins of Paris, refused to set the Princesses free, and Comte Louis de Narbonne, who had foreseen resistance and was determined to oppose it, was obliged to make use of the detachment of hussars he had taken with him. Blood was spilt at Moret.

The excitement caused by this disturbance was heightened by a *canard* that Mesdames were absconding with millions of money for the emigrant army on the Rhine. They were arrested again at Arnay-le-Duc, and the Assembly, overawed by the Jacobins, who appeared to be supported by the people, timidly hesitated to enforce its previous order. After some days wasted in discussing whether the Princesses should be brought back to Paris or allowed to continue their journey, Mirabeau mounted the tribune and denounced in an amusing speech the usurpation of the authority of the Assembly by the Jacobins as a veiled attack on himself.

"And as to the movements of the King's aunts," he

concluded with stinging sarcasm, "Europe will be astonished to learn that a great Assembly has spent several days in deciding whether two old women shall hear a Mass in Paris or in Rome!"

Laughed free, these relics of the *ancien régime* continued their journey without further molestation, escorted by Narbonne and his hussars. But the Jacobins, exasperated by Mirabeau's defiance, at once introduced a bill to prohibit emigration as a "danger to the safety of the people," counting on his opposition to convince the People of his treachery. It seemed impossible, considering the undisguised terror and hatred of emigration felt by the People, for Mirabeau to escape the loss of his popularity if he opposed the bill, or that of his prestige if he remained silent. The Jacobins, however, in their eagerness overreached themselves. The bill when read to the Assembly was so extreme as to cause the utmost indignation and fear, of which Mirabeau at once took advantage. Rushing to the tribune, he denounced the bill, and defended his reasons for so doing in the greatest and most eloquent speech of his whole career. Withered by his impassioned arguments and scathing contempt into a silence which proclaimed how crushing was their defeat, the thirty Jacobin members of the Assembly withdrew amid the hisses of the galleries from which they had looked for support. The bill was rejected; and to complete his triumph, the Assembly, whose authority he had restored, decreed that his speech should be placarded throughout France.

But great as was the moral effect of this victory, Hercules had not slain the Hydra. It was not to be slain; the divine blood of the Revolution was in its veins. It would recover from the wounds he had dealt it, recover and—— ? The intense exhaustion he felt on emerging from this contest made him shudder at the idea of another. A sudden thought struck him. He would go to the club of the Jacobins that very night and

tame the Hydra, since he could not slay it, enchant it into subjection while it lay prone under his heel!

At any other time the extravagance of the thought would have exhilarated him, but all that was picturesque or romantic in his struggle for power had been blighted by his discovery of the Queen's duplicity. "Saving the monarchy" had degenerated into saving himself; from a spirited adventure his *coup d'état* had dwindled into an intrigue. Instead of a Monk or a Mazarin he had become a Strafford! Well, if he was destined to play the part of Strafford, he would at least play it as Strafford should have played it.

The monastery in which the Jacobins held their meetings witnessed many strange scenes before it was razed to the ground five years later, but never one more memorable than when Mirabeau entered it for the purpose of fascinating his enemies. The gloom of the nave, from which the monks had been driven to make room for the priests of the new faith, was scarcely dispelled by the light of the candles that lit up its naked walls and revealed a sullen congregation clustered round its desecrated altar. From this altar, converted into a tribune, the Jacobin Dupont was flattering the hatred of his audience, parched with thirst for the blood of Mirabeau. Suddenly a voice cried:

"The enemy of liberty is in our midst!"

All eyes turned and beheld the idol of the People.

He was dressed, as usual, in the extreme of fashion. From his Court hat with its gold fringe and diamond aigrette to the enormous buckles on his red-heeled shoes everything about him was exaggerated—even his large head appeared still larger from the manner in which the leonine mane that covered it was curled and powdered. But vulgar and ostentatious as was the taste he always displayed in his dress, it was nevertheless suited to that of the audience he had to play to; he had studied the populace too well to run the risk of offending it by aping

the delicacy and refinement of an aristocrat. There was something brutal in his elegance that harmonised with his swollen and ungainly form. The commanding intelligence of his wonderful eyes seemed but to increase the hideousness of his bloated face, which was covered with blotches and scars. He looked monstrous, haunting, terrifying.

At the sight of him the Jacobins uttered a yell of execration, and Dupont, disconcerted and confused, left the tribune. Immediately Lameth, the leader of the Jacobins, sprang into his place; hate and envy gave him an eloquence that he never before or afterwards possessed. Under the lash of his invective Mirabeau sat dripping with sweat.

"See," cried Camille Desmoulins profanely, "he bleeds like Christ on Calvary!"

It seemed impossible that he should ever repel an attack so envenomed, much less leave the hall alive. But when Lameth, exhausted by passion, finished, Mirabeau rose to his feet. At once to prevent him from speaking a wild attempt was made to adjourn the meeting, but in the intense excitement it was impossible to put the motion to the vote, and Mirabeau forced his way to the tribune.

"Boaster! liar! traitor! dictator! His very soul is pitted with the small-pox!" howled frenzied voices as he mounted the steps.

After three-quarters of an hour, during which with a calm disdain he contemplated the seething hall, the tumult ceased. A horrible and fatal curiosity impelled the Jacobins to hear what he had to say. Lameth had denounced his past life; the pathos with which Mirabeau defended it awoke a feeling of pity in the emotional audience. Under the spell of his Orphean voice tears started to the eyes of those who had but a while before cursed him; the galleries packed with the populace, *his* populace, were shaken with sobs. Recognising the effect he had produced, he suddenly became indignant and

terrible. His rage boiled over and scalded those on whom it fell. Then in the full tide of victory, casting aside all that was personal, he began to plead the cause of liberty and patriotism, the sublime cause of the Revolution. Never had the Jacobins heard such eloquence, never again were they to hear it. His courage, his noble bearing, filled his hearers with admiration. Infected with the enthusiasm he had excited, he paused, and breaking the breathless silence, he cried passionately:

"Brothers, I too am a Jacobin, and nothing shall separate us!"

Then, in the midst of deafening applause, he descended from the tribune and left the club.

But great as was his triumph, he had only half succeeded in taming the Hydra. The very next day the envy he had silenced found its voice again.

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST LABOUR OF HERCULES

THE enemies of Mirabeau had not long to wait for their revenge. It was on the 27th of February that he had wrestled with the Jacobin Hydra. On the 2nd of April of the same year, 1791, his corpse, sprinkled with perfumes and covered with flowers, as he had desired, lay waiting burial.

During this interval of five weeks the Hercules had worn his Nessus-shirt.

"I must be a salamander, to endure the fire that is consuming me," he said on leaving the Jacobins to Dumont, the Swiss hack whom he employed as his parliamentary private secretary.

He had often before suffered from intense internal pains; three years in the dungeons of Vincennes had shattered his health, which in spite of his great frame had never been perfect. But he still seemed so full of energy, so vividly alive, and he was so much needed, that nobody believed him to be desperately ill. His friends merely advised him to take a short rest, to seek a change of air. In the hope that the fresh country air would benefit him he went to his *château* at Argenteuil, near Paris, to pass a few days—the old house in which his father had died, and which had been made splendid by Court bribes. But what rest could there be for him with France in revolution? He returned to Paris no better, to die as by a slow fire.

As his carriage entered the city the populace, recognising the man it bore, flocked round it shouting, "You are wanted! You are wanted! Vive Mirabeau! Vive le Roi Mirabeau!"

He was accompanied thus up to the very door of his house in the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin. Short as had been his absence, his subjects had missed him.

Far from cheering him, this reception seemed to deepen his despondency. He turned to young Frochot, his favourite secretary, who was with him, and said sadly:

"It is only when I am gone for ever that they will know the real value of me. The miseries that I have held back will then burst forth from all sides on France. I shall die before I can accomplish anything."

But though his illness increased he still continued to attend the National Assembly and to take part in the debates. Nor did he abandon the reckless and dissolute pleasures in which, during so many years, he had sought consolation for the infamy, ostracism, hardship he had been compelled so unjustly to endure. Driven by despair into debauchery, he had found in it, if not pleasure, at least revenge. Nothing gave him a more trivial, a more scornful satisfaction than to tear the veil from his nocturnal revels and defy the merciless Respectability of which he had been the victim. But strange as it may seem, there was a *heart* in his vice. Though life had brutally destroyed all his illusions, it had failed to destroy his belief in his power to recreate them. And this miracle he tried to perform—God out of liberty, love out of countless *liaisons*. The one he had carved out of his soul and personality, and setting it upon a pedestal of matchless rhetoric, implored the Assembly, the Jacobins, the People in the streets, and the Court to worship it. The other he quested everywhere, anywhere. Now he imagined he had found the love he had lost in the tender Madame de Nehra, pure as an annunciation lily, whom

he plucked from a convent garden. Now in Madame Le Jay, the scheming and vulgar wife of his publisher. Again in the laps of prostitutes. Once, for an intoxicating moment, he thought he saw it on the throne itself, gazing at him out of the eyes of Marie Antoinette. And, strangest of all anomalies, Morality held her tongue while she watched the greatest man in France chaining himself like a galley-slave to the oar of vice.

About the middle of March, on leaving the *salon* of the Marquise de Condorcet, where he had been the soul of some of the most brilliant intellects in Paris, he spent the entire night at table surrounded with opera singers and ballet dancers. On the morrow of this orgy Mirabeau again visited Argenteuil. Here, he was suddenly seized with a colic of the kidneys, which caused him inexpressible agony. It was some time before his feeble cries for assistance were heard, still longer before a physician could be procured. He fancied he had been poisoned; his friends believed it. Yes, he was poisoned, but it was with the poison of the persecutions and hardships he had endured; the poison of misunderstanding and obloquy; the poison of despair and the vices which he took like drugs to narcotise despair. His youth, as he himself said, had disinherited his old age. And the Revolution, the succubus! who whored it among so many geniuses, poured into his ears her poison of popularity and glory.

Burning to death with all these poisons, he was destined to be calcined with the fire of his own eloquence. He had been kept at Argenteuil several days by the violence of his nephritic attack, when one morning he declared his intention of returning to Paris. He had remembered that it was the day on which the Assembly would discuss the law for the sequestration of mines, which, if passed, meant the ruin of La Marck. To fail in friendship was not to be contemplated. The honour of a Riqueti demanded that he should go to the Assembly if it cost him his life.

Fearing lest he should be retained by force at Argenteuil from a mistaken sense of kindness, he assumed a marvellous control over his sufferings which deceived his doctors.

"To the Comte de la Marck's!" he cried in a ringing voice, entering his carriage without assistance.

The fatigue of the journey proved too much for him. To the terror of the devoted young Frochot, who accompanied him, he fainted again and again. At the sight of him La Marck was aghast.

"You shall not go to the Assembly," he said; "I will not allow it."

"Do you think I have come all this distance to be stopped now?" returned Mirabeau impatiently. "I shall go, and neither you nor any one else shall prevent me. The Jacobins would ruin you if I did not go. Give me a glass of your Hungary wine."

A bottle was instantly brought to him; he drank off two glasses and re-entered his carriage.

"At least let me come with you," pleaded La Marck.

Mirabeau put a trembling hand on his shoulder and looked at him beseechingly.

"If you love me," he said, "you will not go to the Assembly to-day. You would ruin all if you were to be seen there. Wait for me here till I return."

And La Marck yielded.

His arrival at the Assembly created an immense sensation. Could this pale and emaciated man, whose neck, covered with carbuncles, was swathed in bandages, be the ghost of Mirabeau? The very Jacobins as they looked at him shuddered. Camille Desmoulins, as generous-hearted as he was wrong-headed, felt the tears dim his eyes. Mirabeau mounted the tribune. A hush fell upon the Assembly. In the familiar vibrant voice, with the old magical glance, he opposed the law under discussion. He was heard with a sort of respectful awe rather than with conviction. The sight of him feebly descending

from the tribune clutched the heartstrings. Suddenly Robespierre rose to refute his arguments. The member for Arras spoke with more than his usual acid eloquence. When he had finished the dying Hercules once more mounted the tribune. Five times altogether the Assembly beheld him ascend and descend those steps.

"It is his swan-song," murmured Lafayette to a neighbour; "he is sacrificing what remains in him of life to his friendship."

Pity, envy, terror, awe, a hundred different emotions pervaded the Assembly. What, was he going to die there, then, in their midst, as a human sacrifice offered to the malice of the Jacobins? How fearful he was to look upon! It was as though Death itself were debating in the Assembly! Would nothing silence that voice but a victory? Ah, let him have it then!

The poison of triumph was all but fatal. On leaving the Assembly he had to be carried to his carriage, but he would not consent to be driven home till he had first called at La Marck's. He had promised his friend to return, and his Herculean will should oblige his strength to support him.

"Your cause is gained, my friend," he murmured as La Marck, informed of his arrival too late to prevent him from dismounting from his carriage, met him at the top of the stairs, "but I am dying."

It was only then, when he had no further need of his strength, that he swooned.

The next day all Paris knew that Mirabeau had lain down to die. His house was at once besieged by ever-increasing crowds that encumbered the entire Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin and choked all its approaches. The human tide even overflowed into the court-yard, and lapping the stairs, crept to the very door of the presence chamber of death. Every class was represented. Great ladies of the old Court stood next to *poissardes* who had brought the King and Queen from Versailles; generals,

privates of the national guard, deputies of all parties, workmen, prostitutes, rich and poor, old and young, were assembled for the first and last time in the Revolution on the same level—a common level of sympathy, curiosity, respect, and fear. The behaviour of this immense multitude was extraordinarily impressive; a single heart seemed to beat in a thousand breasts, a thousand lives to hang on a single breath—the feeble breath of a dying man. The stillness was sombre—the stillness of life confronted with death. Men, women, and children spoke to one another in whispers, as if afraid to breathe, and questioned in low voices the King's messengers, deputations, and all who came from within, for whom on arriving as well as on going they willingly and quietly made way. From time to time bulletins were scattered among them from a window, which passed untorn through innumerable hands. Now and then a sob rose above the muffled murmur of the multitude. When it was known that Cabanis no longer hoped, a youth, frantic with hero-worship, implored that his fresh, virile blood should be transfused into the clogged and impoverished veins of the dying man. On each of the three days of Mirabeau's agony the same scenes were repeated, and many persons remained all night in front of the house. Such huge and grief-stricken crowds had not been seen in Paris for centuries; not since, men said, the Twelfth Louis had died, he who was called the Father of his people. But it was not only the death of a demi-god, a saviour, a man, that stirred them so profoundly, but a sense that with him France itself was dying.

The impressive harmony of this spectacle was broken by a single discord, which by its shocking nature and its occurrence at such a moment rendered it doubly discordant. For six hours on the third and last day an old woman was seen sitting on a dog-hutch in the court-yard, looking at all who came down the stairs with a sort of malevolent curiosity, as if she awaited some

message to be sent her from the death-chamber above. Her hair was white and dishevelled ; her cheeks sunken, faded, and scarred ; in the crescent formed by her prominent nose and chin, her shrivelled lips were compressed into a sneer. Her eyes alone gave life and intelligence to what otherwise was but a mask of a face—a mask such as a Roman actor might have worn in the *rôle* of Hecate. They blazed like live coals in their gaunt eye-sockets, seeming to singe all they rested on. From her shabby and mean attire she might have been a beggar, some hag from an attic in the slums ; from the malignity of her expression and her feverish attitude of waiting, some spirit in torment sent to bear the soul of Mirabeau to the nether world. She never spoke to any one, nor did any one speak to her, though all who saw her wondered as they passed her who she was. But a few days later she informed Paris through the press that she was the *mother* of Mirabeau and had waited in vain to be *invited* to the death-bed of her son !

Meanwhile, the scenes that were witnessed by those who were admitted to the room in which Mirabeau lay dying were no less impressive than those passing in the street without. But though extraordinarily impressive, the *style*, so to speak, of his death was conventional. For in quitting this world men may die with bravery, or with cowardice, or with indifference, as Christians or as infidels, well or ill, but the manner of dying of all will have an air peculiar to the age. It is in the hour of death that human nature is most imitative. And each age has its own air, habit, point of view, what you will, of death. In the eighteenth century it was formed and regulated by three influences—etiquette, unbelief, and sensibility. The ceremonial of Versailles, which exercised all the authority of a religion over the mind, had taught people to consider death as a social function. The Philosophers, who had exploded all faith in everything with the bomb of atheism, had accustomed men to treat death with

indifference. And Jean Jacques Rousseau, from whose pen there flowed a Niagara of sentiment that deafened the ears of Reason, showed men how to make death appear artificial. The combined result of these three influences on the character of a rapidly rotting civilisation was a strange mixture of pomp, flippancy, and insincerity, out of which human nature had developed a new and attractive emotion—the pose. Life had become a play, in which, as in all plays, there was nothing real save the acting. Without being really virtuous or vicious, men acted virtue and vice, and were applauded and hissed in proportion to their success. In the same way they had acted love and hate, joy and fear, tears and laughter—and when it came to death they acted death.

With the advent of the Revolution this pose became pagan and sublime. To find the costume appropriate to a part so long ignored as freedom, men ransacked the wardrobes where it was most likely to be found—the histories of the Greek and Roman republics. The Revolution was but another Renaissance. The only difference between the two revivals of antiquity in Christian Europe was that in the first man resurrected the Beautiful, in the second, Liberty. The character of each was essentially pagan. Plutarch was the prophet of the French Renaissance as Praxitiles had been of the Italian. Of the latter, Venus and Apollo were the patron saints, Brutus and the Gracchi of the former. Having acquired the air, men tried to copy the speech of antiquity; the Assembly became the Capitol, the Jacobins the Tarpeian rock. Paris *acted* Rome. Those who objected to conform to the new custom crossed the Rhine; those who remained submitted, and more or less consciously conformed to the fashion of the times.

Like all his contemporaries, Mirabeau had acted his life, few so theatrically and publicly. There had been occasions, however, when he had not acted, when the pose of his life had been punctuated with realities. His

chivalrous defence of his mother when driven from Bignon was real, so was his chastisement of the Baron de Mouans, so too his haughty challenge to the Court when the existence of the States General was at stake. The first was the protest of an outraged heart, the second of an outraged pride of race, the third of an outraged sense of right. He might, so intense was his personality, have been real too in his death, had its appeal been unaffected. But being an actor by instinct, with such a stage on which to die and with such an audience to behold him, it was inevitable that he should pose. He not only acted his death but dramatised it as well. Never was a *rôle* more carefully studied, never one more suited to the temperament of the actor ; and as he remained master of his marvellous mind to the last, in spite of, or on account of, his horrible sufferings, he gave the world a masterpiece in dramatic dying which it has seldom witnessed.

Nevertheless the fame of his death is due to the fact that his name rendered it conspicuous. As a play it was merely an adaptation, revealing the spirit of the times rather than the originality of the author. What was remarkable about it was his interpretation of his *rôle ;* he gave to the pagan conception a grandiose character all his own.

The consolation that all instinctively seek at such an hour he found in the consciousness that the world was looking on and applauding. To prevent the priests of the Catholic religion from intruding on the scene and spoiling the play, he begged Talleyrand, the agnostic Bishop of Autun, to drive them away. He had not the least fear of another world.

"I have never intentionally harmed any one," he said to the philosophic Cabanis, whom alone for friendship's sake he suffered to prescribe for him ; "why then should I be afraid ? Of whom ? You are a great physician, but there is one greater than you—the author of the air

that endues all, of the water that penetrates all, of the fire that quickens and dissolves all."

Dying, he was, as it were, drunk with life. He treated death as if it were some sad game at which he was playing. He sent word to his mistresses to compose epitaphs for his tomb. He draped himself metaphorically in his shroud and remarked upon the "noise his memory would make" in falling so prematurely into the tomb. "When I was in this world," he said, speaking of himself as if he were already among the immortals. The sight of his uncle, the Bailli, stricken with grief for the dying name of Mirabeau perhaps more than for the dying man who bore it, reminded him of the pride of family, which had always counted for so much in the lives of the Riquetis. In bidding farewell to the Bailli, he bade a theatrical adieu to his lineage rather than to his uncle. Calling young du Saillant, his nephew, to whose mother alone of his kindred he had long been reconciled, and who with her children was with him to the end, he said :

"Sooner than that the name of Mirabeau should cease, you must bear it. Remember, I wish it."

The young man looked at him proudly, like a Cæsar who had just been raised to the purple by a Roman emperor.

At such a moment to dwell on the feuds which not even the grave could silence would have caused a sublime actor to forget his part. He never mentioned his mother, ignorant that at that moment she was sitting on a dog-hutch in his courtyard among the crowd haughtily waiting for an invitation to his bed-side that never came. He had not seen her for years. She was as dead to him as his father, or as Madame de Cabris, who had passed out of his life vindictively, or as his brother, who had scarcely ever come into it, and was now in exile dragging the name of Mirabeau into the mire from which he had raised it by so many Hercules' labours.

The messengers from the King, and the deputations sent to represent the Assembly, the Jacobins, the departments of Paris, the civic bodies, the constituency of Aix —Hercules' own constituency—reminded him of the necessity of acknowledging the plaudits of his audience.

Barnave, his quondam rival, who was sent by the Jacobins, he kissed with tears.

To Talleyrand, who brought him the adieu of the Assembly, he said :

"It is you who should announce my death to the representatives of the people. Let them know what an immense prey Death has seized!"

To the King's messengers he was prophetic.

"Alas, that I should carry with me to the grave the trappings of the monarchy!" he sighed. "After I am gone the factions will tear it to pieces."

In tragic dramas there are moments of gaiety that are introduced to heighten by their contrast the grand gloom of the tragedy. The jests of Mirabeau froze the fountains of tears that his splendid acting had unlocked.

Among those who came sobbing to bid him farewell was his favourite niece, Madame du Saillant's daughter, the young, beautiful, and devoted Marquise d'Aragon, from whose house at Passy he had gone to his famous and fruitless meeting with the Queen.

"Behold," he cried, as she embraced him tenderly, "Death lying in the arms of Spring!"

Perhaps only she who took part in the tableau realised what this bit of acting cost him.

More ironical was the gaiety with which he greeted La Marck.

Some days previously the two had talked of death and death-beds. "As for me," La Marck had said, "the most beautiful and impressive deaths that I have witnessed—and I have had much experience on battle-fields and in hospitals—are those where the dying preserve a perfect calm and express no regret at quitting life, merely

contenting themselves with begging to be placed in such a position as to enable them to pass away with as little suffering as possible."

"Ah! my friend," exclaimed Mirabeau, to whom the sight of La Marck at such a moment recalled this conversation, "you have come in time to do me a last favour."

La Marck, choked by grief, looked at him questioningly.

"It is but a little favour," continued Mirabeau with stoical composure, though torn with pain at the time; "raise me—ah! so," he murmured, pressing the hand of La Marck, who already obeyed him, "that I may pass away quietly with as little pain as possible, as I do calmly and without regret."

He sighed deeply and closed his eyes. Could it be possible that he was dead? The hearts of La Marck and the others in the room seemed to stop beating as they hung over him. Suddenly Mirabeau opened his eyes, and fixing them on La Marck, said, with an irony that gave point to the words:

"And now, connoisseur in beautiful deaths, are you satisfied?"

On the third day he began to sink. Only those whom he had loved the most were summoned. He wished it so. Around him gathered Cabanis, young Frochot, La Marck, Madame du Saillant, and the Marquise d'Aragon.

"Sit here," he said, "sit there."

A sudden stab of pain silenced him.

"Let me lift your head, so," said Frochot, with streaming eyes.

"Would I could bequeath it to you, dear one!" murmured Mirabeau, and putting Frochot's hands into those of La Marck, he added, looking at the latter, "I leave this friend to you. You have seen his affection for me; he deserves yours."

La Marck bowed his head in assent.

"Ah, my debts, my debts!" sighed the dying man, a moment later.

"Leave them to me," whispered the rich La Marck, who, with a noble impulse, took them upon himself to discharge.

Mirabeau smiled and fell into a coma. They rubbed his hands, which were already icy. He regained his senses, but the pain he was suffering prevented him from speaking. Divining his thoughts, they gave him paper and a pencil.

"Let me sleep," he scrawled, and he looked at Cabanis imploringly.

A calming mixture was given him, but it was without effect. He seized the pencil again and wrote:

"How can you be so cruel as to let me die by slow torture?"

The day drew to a close with these alternations of suffering and coma. The night that followed was sinister. Cabanis, watching at the bed-side, saw death at dawn imprinted on his face. Mirabeau himself realised that the end had come, and he was prepared to meet it.

"I feel that I shall die to-day," he said. "When one is in my state there is only one thing to do, and that is to perfume oneself, to crown oneself with flowers, and thus, surrounded with music, enter agreeably into that sleep from which there is no awakening."

He asked that a window should be opened and his bed rolled to it. Love instantly obeyed him. It was April in Paris. Through the open window there poured upon the dying man a flood of sunshine, golden and perfumed with the breath of spring. The whole room was inundated with light.

"If this is not God," he murmured, "it is His shadow!"

To those who silently, sadly gathered around him it seemed as he lay there in the glory of Nature as if they

were witnessing the apotheosis of a demi-god. Suddenly a cannon boomed over Paris and startled the watchers. It was, in fact, the signal for which they had waited. For an instant Mirabeau was shaken out of the lethargy of death.

"What!" he cried, sitting up in his bed, "are the preparations for the funeral of Achilles already begun?"

He fell back even while he spoke. A minute later Cabanis whispered, "He is dead!"

He had lived forty-two years.

The news was despatched at once and secretly to the President of the National Assembly. Immediately on receiving it he mounted the tribune and said solemnly:

"Mirabeau is dead!"

Within an hour the words were echoed all over Paris. The People, who had watched over him like a mother over a child, considered him as their dead, and sent a deputation to the Assembly to demand that he should be buried in the Field of the Oath of Federation, *ci-devant* Champ de Mars, "under the altar of the Fatherland."

The Assembly, even had it wished, would not have dared to refuse a public funeral to so popular an idol. The President, with a view to prove to the people how closely in touch with them their representatives were, suggested that the church of Sainte Geneviève, patron saint of Paris, would be a more appropriate tomb.

"And," he added, "let us decree that this edifice henceforth be known as the Pantheon, and set apart to receive the ashes of our great men with this inscription on its peristyle: "AUX GRANDS HOMMES LA PATRIE RECONNAISSANTE."

An idea at once so Roman and sublime could not fail to dazzle the imagination. It was unanimously agreed that the Citizen Gabriel Riqueti Mirabeau was judged worthy to receive this honour, and that the Assembly should assist in a body at the funeral.

Never before in France had there been known such a funeral. It was the burial not of a man, but of a nation; with the passing of Mirabeau, Old France had breathed her last. But in spite of this outward unanimity of grief and glory, the Court, the Assembly, and the Jacobins secretly rejoiced at the death of so formidable a rival. The first had mistrusted him, the second had feared him, and the third had envied him. It was only the populace who had idolised him. Weak, he had made them strong. Inarticulate, he had given them speech. It was his eloquence that had pulled down the Bastille and brought the so-called tyrant to Paris. To thwart the wishes of the populace neither the Court, nor the Assembly, nor the Jacobins dared. To do so in the Revolution would have been madness. But it costs hypocrisy nothing to feign tears and enthusiasm; knowing the people, it is always sure of its revenge. On the very day after the funeral infamous Marat flung the first stone at the name and fame of the dead man.

"O people!" he shrieked, "let us give thanks to the gods! Thy most redoubtable enemy has fallen, has fallen! Lives there a man so base as to deem it an honour that his ashes should rest by the side of Mirabeau's?"

Within two years these very people who had buried their benefactor so sublimely were to tear him from his tomb to make room for the stabbed corpse of Marat.

The exhumed body of Mirabeau was buried in a convict cemetery.

But Marat did not rest long in the Pantheon he desecrated. A ghoulish Revolution, ever drinking the blood that dripped from the guillotine, even wandered among the tombs seeking food. One day it stumbled upon the skeleton of Marat and flung it with disgust into a sewer.

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